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“SHEBA.”

A STUDY OF GIRLHOOD.

By “RITA,”

AUTHOR OF “DAME DURDEN,” “DARBY AND JOAN,” “THE LADYE NANCYE,”  
“GRETCHEN,” ETC., ETC.

## CHAPTER I.

SWEETHEARTS.

“COO-EE—coo-ee—coo-ee!”

The last syllable was so prolonged and ear-piercing, that a figure almost hidden from sight in a leafy wilderness of tangled shrub and grass, raised itself impatiently on one arm and looked round in the direction of the sound.

The retreat she had discovered for herself was closed in by rough wooden palings, and it was towards an aperture in one of these that a pair of dark sombre eyes flashed their angry challenge.

“Another of you boys! Well, what do *you* want, Ted Sanderson?”

The expression of the face as seen through the palings, was somewhat sheepish and bashful.

“Oh!” said the boy, with affected indifference, “I—I only wanted to say I had brought you something.”

“You might have said it without making such a row,” the girl rejoined crossly. “What have you brought?”

“Oh, only a few peaches.”

“Bobby Burton was here not a quarter-of-an-hour ago,” said the girl, turning away with supreme indifference; “and he brought me a hatful of loquats. I like them much better than peaches. Why, we’ve peaches enough in the garden to supply all Sydney. What’s the use of bringing more?”

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"Well, don't be cross, Sheba. I'll bring you loquats to-morrow, and, I say, do come a little nearer, I've got something else to tell you."

"Oh do go away," cried the girl impatiently. "I'm sick to death of you all! This comes of being the only girl in the place. The moment school is over you all come here and pester my life out with your nonsense; I'm not coming any nearer—so there! It's much too hot to move; and you'll get a sunstroke if you don't go home."

There was no answer for a moment or two, so concluding that her advice had been taken, the girl turned once more to her book, tossing back a mane of dark curling hair, and leaning her cheeks on either hand, supported by her elbows. The attitude was one of more comfort than grace, and perhaps for that reason commended itself to feminine fourteen, which represents Sheba Ormatroyd with regard to sex and age. For the rest, she was dark, thin, angular, and even more precocious than the generality of Australian "Cornstalks," the designation of the white "natives" of the country. But peace was not to be yet. Something came flying over the palings, and taking its way past shrub and gum tree and all the wild luxuriant tangle of weed and creeper and flower that made the charm of Sheba's "Wilderness," fell almost at her elbow. She drew herself up impatiently; before her, was a folded piece of paper, with a stone inclosed to weight its flight to her. She seized it, and tossing the stone aside, spread out the not over-clean scrap and read it.

Not much to read, only five words in a scrawling irregular hand.

*"Will you be my sweetheart?"*

She looked at the missive, and the frown on her brow deepened as she tossed the paper contemptuously aside, and once more turned her attention to her book.

Five minutes passed quickly, then a long low whistle broke the sultry stillness, and a voice cried entreatingly: "Have you read it?"

The girl sprang to her feet. "Yes, of course," she said crossly. "Such rubbish. What on earth do you want to be sweethearts for?"

"Because—well, because I'm awfully fond of you, and—and, oh, because all the other boys said you'd never look at me; and do say 'Yes,' Sheba, and I'll bring you some scent to-morrow. Mother got some to-day from Sydney, and I'll make her give me a bottle of it for you. No one has given you *that*," with a voice of triumph.

"Scent!" said Sheba thoughtfully. "Well, I don't mind; only don't go and put water into it so as to fill the bottle, like you did before; it was so weak that it didn't make my handkerchief smell a bit, even when I *washed* it in it."

"Yes, I remember," laughed the youthful swain, who numbered fifteen years, but was nearly six feet high. "But say 'Yes' to what I asked, Sheba. You haven't told me yet."

"Yes," said the girl tranquilly. "Of course it's understood the arrangement is only to stand until I get tired of you, and you're only to kiss me once a day when you're quite sure no one's by!"

"Very well; but I may write?"

"If you like, certainly; but what's the use of writing when you can speak to me?"

"Well, you see, writing's just to say sweetheart things; it comes easier when you write."

"Does it?" she said doubtfully, and looked upwards through the sheltering boughs to where the flawless burning blue of the sky spread its brilliant canopy.

"I write," she went on presently, "heaps and heaps of things, but not about sweethearts, only about the stars and the flowers, and why we think, and why God lets us live, and what it will all end in."

"You *are* a funny girl," said the young swain admiringly. "However, that's settled; I made up my mind I would ask you to-day and I've done it. What are you reading there?"

"Roman history," said Sheba, seating herself on the soft tangle of grass and creeper that formed her nest.

"It's awfully dry, isn't it?" said the boy. "What makes you read it?"

"Because I like it for one thing, and because I've nothing else for another. Mother has a lot of books locked up in the book-case, but she'll never let me read one of them. Oh," clasping her hands round her knees and raising the great sombre, passionate eyes to the wide blue heavens, "what I wouldn't give to have books—hundreds and thousands of books! Books to read from morning till night. All the great thoughts of great men and women! I think sometimes it's like a fever in me, this craze for reading, and I suppose," she added mournfully, "it will never be satisfied—never! At least, as long as I stop here."

"Perhaps," said Ted soothingly, "you won't stop here always."

"Oh," she cried passionately, "I hope not, I hope not. I do so want to see the world. I should like to go everywhere; to do everything. But what's the use of talking? We're horribly poor, and always will be, I suppose; and though I've rich relations in England they're never likely to trouble their heads about *me*. As for taking me travelling, phew——" She gave a low, long, peculiar whistle, and a look of comical resignation came over her face. "I suppose you won't be rich, Ted?" she added speculatively.

"I don't know," said the boy. "I may; lots of squatters are. But then it takes time."

"Yes," said Sheba, "so it does, and I suppose when I am old I won't feel quite so keen about things as I do now. I wouldn't mind marrying you if you were rich, Ted; that's to say if you would let me have my own way in everything. I never get it at home, so when I make a change I should like it to be to my advantage."

"Wouldn't you marry me before I was rich?" asked the boy eagerly. "I'd try to get on so much harder if I had you with me. I've always been so fond of you, you know, Sheba; only I was afraid to tell you, for you do snap at the boys so, and you never seemed to care about any one except Hex."

"It would be odd," said Sheba disdainfully, "if I didn't care for my own brother. Don't talk nonsense, Ted; and really, you had better go home now, for it's nearly tea-time, and I must go in and make it. Mother has one of her bad headaches, and the new servant who came from Sydney last night is as ignorant as a pig."

"All right; I'm going. When shall I see you again?"

"Oh," said the girl indifferently, "I'm generally here in the afternoons."

"But then there's the palings," he objected.

She laughed; the laugh was a charming one, clear and sweet as silver bells and with the ring of pure heart-whole youth in it.

"What of that? I can talk to you just as well through them as within them."

"Well, come nearer now; you know we're sweethearts, so you might let me have a kiss."

The girl walked straight up to the palings, her eyes dancing with mischief and laughter. Then she thrust one small brown hand through the aperture. "Kiss that," she said, "it will do for to-day."

"No, thank you," said Ted huffily. "Any one can kiss hands; it's only a mark of respect."

"You should be ashamed," said Sheba, "to say you don't respect your sweetheart!"

She turned away and marched off in quite a dignified manner, leaving her young swain utterly disconcerted. Seeing that there was no likelihood of her return, Ted took his departure also, looking somewhat sulky and depressed. He was scarcely out of sight when the girl came running back. She had forgotten her Roman history. She stooped and picked up the book and was once more retreating when a soft low-breathed "Coo-ee," made her turn to the opening in the palings. Another face, round, rosy, boyish, was staring at her.

"Sheba," came a voice of entreaty from the new-comer, "come here, do; just a minute. I've something to tell you."

"Bobby Burton, one," said the girl; "Ted Sanderson, two; Felix Short, three. Now pray what is your—something?"



"It's real news!" said the boy eagerly. "You *will* be astonished. Not a soul knows it yet, but me and Mr. Crawley; he told me just as I was coming out of school."

"Well, what is it?" asked Sheba, coming nearer, but with no apparent interest in face or voice. She was used to the "boys" and their wonderful pieces of news, which somehow when imparted always fell short of actual novelty.

"Will you give me a kiss if I tell you?"

"Certainly not," she said scornfully. "I hate kissing!"

"Well," he said, somewhat abashed, "here it is: you know the Crow's Nest, that old dreary tumble-down looking place in the hollow, a mile down the road?"

"Yes, of course. What about it?"

"Some one is coming to live there. Only fancy! a gentleman from England and a lot of girls. There, now, Miss Sheba, won't your nose be put out of joint; you'll no longer be the only one."

"You are a very vulgar boy," said Sheba with dignity; "but if your news is true it's about the only thing worth hearing that I've ever heard you say. Girls—oh!" and she clasped her hands in ecstasy, "how lovely. How many of them?"

"About six, I believe," said her informant. "You don't mean to say you're really glad?"

"Do I ever say anything I *don't* mean?" asked Sheba with scorn. "You know that's why I am always called disagreeable."

"I never called you *that*," said the boy eagerly.

"No, I don't think you did; not that it would have mattered. Now I wonder if this is true. What's the name of the people?"

"Saxton, I believe. English people have rum names."

The girl laughed. "Are not ours of English origin? I'm sure mine's funny enough. What's that you're holding under your arm all this time?"

"It's—it's—something for you."

"Oh," said Sheba indifferently, "the third something. Well, what's yours?"

"A book," answered the boy.

"A book!" Her whole face glowed and changed. "Oh, you dear Felix! you're the best of the lot. Let me see it. What's the name?"

"It's a lovely book," he said, "but I'll only give it you on one condition."

"What's that?"

"That you'll be my sweetheart."

"Oh dear," cried the girl in comic despair, "what has come over you all? Why, you're the third who's asked me this afternoon. I can't be everybody's sweetheart. Why didn't you come sooner? I've promised Ted Sanderson now, and he's going to bring me some scent to-morrow. Won't it do if I promise to be your sweetheart next?"

"No, thank you," said Felix sturdily. "Ted's a big fellow, but I'm as good as he any day, and I'm much fonder of you."

"How can you tell that?" asked Sheba speculatively. "You can't possibly know how fond he is."

"He can't be as fond as I am," reiterated the third admirer. "It's not possible. Haven't I been after you for all this last year? and I saved up my money to buy you this book because I heard you say you'd like to read it. It's the 'Arabian Nights,' and full of pictures—there!"

The girl turned pale; her breath came short and eager with intense excitement.

"Oh, Felix, is it really? How good of you. There's nothing almost I wouldn't give you for that book, but I can't break my promise; it wouldn't be right."

"I suppose not," said Felix loftily, "so I won't trouble you any more. I wish you joy of your great lumbering Cornstalk. You've made a nice choice. Scent! What's scent? Just a sniff or two and then it's all gone; but a book—and a book like this—why you could read it over and over again and never be tired."

"I know," said Sheba despairingly, "but I can't help it. Good-bye, Felix, you had better give it to one of the new girls. There'll be sweethearts enough for you all now. I hope I shall have a little peace."

She turned away; her eyes were full of tears. The disappointment of that moment was in its way as keen and hard to bear as any sorrow of later life, by which it may look trivial.

The boy stood and watched her, and his face softened. He glanced at the book in his hand and then at the slight girl's figure moving away with downbent head, and slow and halting step.

"Sheba," he called hesitatingly; "I say, Sheba!"

She stopped and looked back. "Well?" she said languidly.

"Here, come back. You shall have the book. I got it for you and it seems a shame to disappoint you. There, cheer up, old girl; I hate to see you cry. But you'll give me a kiss now, won't you?"

"I'd give you a hundred," cried Sheba gratefully, "only I mustn't kiss any one else so long as I'm sweethearts with Ted. You know that's the rule."

"Oh, bother Ted," cried the boy angrily. "I'll fight him on Monday after school. Here, take your book."

He flung the precious volume down at her feet and ran off, while the girl, flushed and radiant, flung herself full length down on the crushed grass, and tearing the paper wrappings from the coveted book, plunged straightway into the wondrous and not too moral introduction to the marvellous stories of the "Arabian Nights."

She devoured page after page, history after history, oblivious of time. She might have remained in her hiding-place till dark, had not an interruption occurred at last which had the effect of bringing her down from her realms of enchantment with startling rapidity.

A light form, graceful as a young fawn, came bounding through the tangled scrub, and a cold nose was rubbed against her cheek and startled her from her absorbed attitude.

She sprang hastily up. "Billy," she cried, "good gracious, how have you found me?"

It was a beautiful young goat, milk-white save for the long silky brown ears, that was rubbing its head against her cotton gown, and uttering feeble little bleats of ecstasy. His presence sufficed to rouse Sheba to some sense of the passage of time, and fondling the pretty playful creature with one hand she picked up her books with the other, and ran off down a narrow foot-track, the goat by her side.

The track wound its way through a perfect wilderness of uncultivated ground, until at last it ended at some broken palings which made a gap large enough for the girl to enter. She climbed through and the goat sprang after her. She was now in a wide cleared space, sheltered and surrounded by towering gum trees. Before her was a low rambling house, built of stone, with a wide verandah running round it.

A stone passage ran through from front to back; the rooms opened off it on either side, and gave egress to the verandah by means of long windows which reached to the ground. The kitchen was not attached to the house, but stood a few yards off. A boy was standing in the back doorway and hailed Sheba as she came in sight.

"Where have you been all this time? Do you know it's six o'clock?"

"Is it really?" cried the girl in trepidation. "Is father home yet?"

"No, you may thank your lucky stars he isn't, and mother's asleep. Where were you?"

"Only in the wilderness; but Felix Short brought me a book. Oh, Hex, it's so lovely; the 'Arabian Nights,' only fancy!"

"Phoooh!" rejoined Hex indifferently. "Books again. What on earth makes you so fond of them? That's why you forgot about tea. Well, go and make it now. There's only cold meat for father, but if Sally hasn't cooked the potatoes properly you'll catch it. And, I say, put out some melon jam for me, there's a good girl; I'm sick of peach. Here, Billy, Billy; just look at him following you into the house! He's like a dog. By-the-way, do you know Vic has got pups—four such beauties. I found them."

"We'll go and see them after tea," said Sheba, disappearing

down the passage to leave her precious books safe in her own room. She flung off her broad shady hat, seized a brush and made some sort of effort at tidying her rebellious locks, and then rushed into the one sitting-room of the house to prepare the tea. In ten minutes it was ready, and Sheba and her brother went out into the verandah to watch for their father's return.

## CHAPTER II.

### A NEW ARRIVAL.

THE wide verandah, with its slanting wooden roof, and pillars almost covered in the luxurious meshes of passion flower and Cape jessamine, constituted the chief "living-room" of the family for most of the year. It led into a garden partially cultivated, and separated from the road by the usual wooden palings. Beyond the road stretched a vast tract of uncultivated country, melting away into dark depths of forest, broken here and there by patches of "scrub" and dark gullies, while farther again, like a dim line against the bright horizon, ran an irregular chain of mountains, the subject of much speculation on the part of Sheba Ormatroyd, who had heard many weird and terrible tales of those mountains from friendly blacks, or wandering squatters.

As she stood now, leaning on the low wooden rails of the verandah, her eyes wandered to that far-off blue line. How near it looked, and yet how many hundreds of miles it was away! That was the worst of Australia, she thought. Everything was so vast, and so large, and so far off, it would take half a life-time to explore it all. She sighed and turned to the goat, which was nibbling the green leaves by her side. She had had the creature from a tiny kid, and brought it up by dint of great care and trouble, and now it was her constant companion and followed her about like a dog, being, indeed, as docile and intelligent as any member of the canine race. She fondled its pretty ears now, and talked to it softly and caressingly, while a flock of pigeons came fluttering down from the eaves, and one snowy fantail perched itself on her shoulder and cooed sweetly in her ear. Sheba loved all dumb creatures with an almost passionate intensity. To live and breathe was to her a sufficient reason for lavishing devotion, and bird and beast and even insects came in for a share of that large-hearted and protective tenderness which is inherent in some feminine natures.

"Do you know, Hex," she said at last, as her feathered pets began to seek their roost with the decline of the sun, "do you know that the Crow's Nest has been taken at last?"

"Has it?" said her brother eagerly. "Who told you?"

"Felix; and he heard it from the schoolmaster. The people

have come from England, he says. There is an old gentleman and a lot of girls."

"Girls!" said Hex with contempt; "and from England! What on earth will they do in the bush?"

"You can't exactly call this the bush," said Sheba. "Every one says it will be quite a town, one day. With a church, and a school, and a store and a lot of houses, it's very different to most places. Look at Tanilba now."

"Oh, of course, that's a few degrees worse," said Hex. "But I'm so sick of this wretched place. I'd like to live in Sydney, or Melbourne, or Bathurst."

"I wouldn't," said Sheba, drawing a long breath and looking round. "I love air and space and freedom. They're better than towns any day."

"Yet you're always longing to get away from here."

"Yes, to travel and see the world and all the beautiful things in it; what 'civilization' is like; but I feel as if I could never *live* in a city, to be cramped up between walls and streets, not a sight of forest and sky, and rivers and mountains. Oh, it would be hateful!"

"Well, so far as I can see," said her brother, "we're likely to live and die here, and nowhere else, so there's no use in wishing. But how late father is. It will soon be dark. I wish he'd make haste, I want my tea."

The girl looked down the long hilly road, a rough and uneven one at its best, which led straight to the ferry some mile and a half off. No one was in sight yet. She turned to the long French window behind her; it was open, but the inside blind was down. She cautiously lifted a corner and looked in. "Mother," she said softly, "may we have tea? Hex is hungry, and it's half-past six now. There's no sign of father. I expect the steamer was late."

"Yes, go and have your tea," said a querulous voice from within the room. "I will come directly. My head is better now."

Sheba turned quickly; as she did so there came a "click" from the closing gate, and she saw two figures enter. "It *is* father!" she cried delightedly, and rushed down the verandah towards the garden. But then she stopped abruptly. A stranger was with her father, a tall man with a bronzed face and snow-white hair, yet not an old man by any means, despite those white locks.

He smiled at the dark and puzzled girl-face turned so wonderingly in his direction.

"One of your youngsters, eh, Ormatroyd?" he asked in pleasant cheery tones.

A troop of dogs came flying out at this moment to welcome their master, and their loud barks and bays rendered speech almost impossible. However, when Mr. Ormatroyd's voice had secured

silence, Sheba learnt that the stranger was no other than the new tenant of the Crow's Nest, and had come over from Sydney that evening with her father, and discovered during the journey that they were old college friends. Mr. Ormatroyd had insisted upon bringing him in to be introduced to his wife, and soon they were all seated at the table partaking of what she termed "bush fare."

It was an anomalous meal, consisting of tea, corned beef, hot potatoes and home-made cakes and bread. Mrs. Ormatroyd presided over the tea-tray, and cut bread and jam for the children. Certainly Sheba did not resemble her mother in appearance, a fact which was being constantly brought before her in the light of a reproach. Mrs. Ormatroyd was a fair tall woman, with a beautiful figure, but her face, despite its regular features, was spoilt by an habitual expression of discontent and ill-temper. The expression, in fact, conveyed Mrs. Ormatroyd's normal state of mind. She was ill-tempered. Nothing satisfied her; nothing pleased her. The trials and troubles she had met with in life were always worse than other people's troubles and trials. She received everything that crossed her own will or desires, with a spirit of resentment that only added to their burden. According to her own version of affairs, she had been specially singled out by Fate as an object for ill-luck, suffering and hardships, and they were things to which she did not take kindly. Trouble embitters some natures; it humbles into patience others. Mrs. Ormatroyd did not belong to the latter class.

Sheba was one of her "trials," and had grown accustomed to hear herself quoted as such. She had run wild ever since she could remember. Her education had been chiefly what she taught herself from books, varied occasionally by a Latin lesson from her father, or a little musical instruction from her mother. The girl had a peculiarly vivid imagination, far in excess of her years, and it was the principal source of all her domestic failures, for at times it completely ran away with her, and led her into perfect quagmires of fanciful troubles and weird adventures.

A chance word let fall would be sufficient to set her off, and her brain would develop the most fearful tragedies, with a rapidity that almost terrified herself.

If Hex absented himself unaccountably, or her father was late, she would evolve a series of pictures from these trivial incidents, each more startling and harrowing than the last, till she woke from her trance of grief, shedding bitter tears over the corpse or the grave, that her vivid fancy had made actual realities for the time being.

To-night she was perfectly absorbed in the novelty of this stranger's visit and conversation—far too much absorbed to pay any attention to her meal. Eating was at all times a vexation to her. She hated formal meals, and detested the sight of flesh or fowl tortured into messes for the gratification of human appetites.

She would have preferred living on fruit, and bread and water, to anything else, but in this, as in most other matters, her will came into conflict with her mother's, and the result was disastrous for Sheba.

Again and again to-night did sharp rebuke recall her attention to the untasted food by her side, and at last only the threat of being sent from the table induced her to eat a few mouthfuls of bread, and drink her cold tea.

Everything that Mr. Saxton said seemed to her so marvellous. The bare idea of meeting and associating with girls—real English girls who had seen London and the Queen—sent her into ecstasies, and thrilled her whole excitable and intense nature with a rapture of expectation. She was sick of boys, and there were so many boys here. Ted Sanderson alone had six brothers; Bobby Burton two; Felix Holt one. The schoolmaster, Mr. Crawley, was a widower with one son. The clergyman was childless, and the doctor, who had only lately settled in the place, and owned a curious rambling old wooden house, called Woollaby, was a grim old bachelor.

These made up all the society of West Shore within a reasonable distance, so Sheba had had things all her own way, and associated only with boys from the time that she could spin a top, or climb a tree, or wield a bat at cricket.

Her ambition of late had been to have a girl friend, as Providence had denied her a sister. She had spent three years in praying for one, but at last concluded reluctantly that its advent was not desirable to the Higher Powers, and gave up her petitions. But a friend, a girl like herself, with hopes, desires, aspirations and sympathies, surely that was not an altogether impossible contingency. Poor Sheba! who had yet to discover how very very different she was to most girls, and how unlikely it was that she ever would find one with kindred tastes and feelings.

But at this present time she hung enraptured on Mr. Saxton's account of his girls. She heard their names, and thought them lovely. Bessie, the eldest, she decided was to be her friend—the special chosen of her heart. The others would take lower place, and do very well as ordinary playmates, but Bessie, who was beautiful and clever, and two years older than herself, she would be first and chief.

Then came Floy, Beatrice and Nora. They were all to arrive on Monday, and this was Saturday, so she would have to command her soul in patience until then. She gave a sigh of resignation, and gulped down her tea. Her mother was telling her to leave the table, and Hex, having torn himself reluctantly from the charms of melon jam, was just putting away his chair.

Sheba rose, then stood breathless, her eyes shining like stars, her hands clasped eagerly. Mr. Saxton was suggesting that his



friend should walk over with him to his new domicile, to see if the vans had arrived, and the man in charge had made any of the rooms habitable.

"Oh," almost sobbed the girl, in her breathless eagerness, "may I come too, father ; do—do let me ? Oh, please do ?"

Mr. Saxton looked with amusement at the eager face. "Come by all means, my dear," he said. "It is a bright moonlight night, but can you walk as far ?"

"Oh yes," cried Sheba, "twice as far." She was trembling all over. Her father had not yet given permission, and Sheba had been brought up on the wholesome principle of being denied most things for which she pleaded or craved. Perhaps this simple request would be found to have some deleterious object or motive, and an inexorable "No" would crush her wild longings, and send her in sick agony of disappointment to weep her heart out in solitude.

However, the Fates were propitious for once. Her father gave permission ; her mother, after objecting that she would be out far beyond her usual bed-time, at last gave a reluctant "Yes," and Sheba flew off like a bird for her hat, the only out-door dress she ever donned for one half the year, and in five minutes more was out, and dancing along with eager feet by side of her new acquaintance.

It was night now, but night clear as day. The full moon shone with dazzling splendour, lighting every turn of the rough road, every leaf and wild flower, with marvellous distinctness. The sky was of the deepest, loveliest blue, and gemmed from end to end with brilliant stars. The sultry heat of the day was over, and every waft of air seemed charged with subtle magnetism. From the bush on either side came strange noises and rustlings—the stir of life from creatures unseen—the flutter of a bird's wing—the hoarse croak of a frog—the whirr of night moths—a deep low hum from a cloud of mosquitoes.

Mr. Saxton glanced at Sheba, dancing along by his side.

"What a wild strange place it is," he said. "And you—I suppose you are a regular little bush girl, eh ?"

"I don't know," said Sheba wistfully. "I really often wonder what I *am* like. You see I've never had any one to compare myself with."

"Indeed," he said, somewhat amused. "Well, we shall soon remedy that. I'm glad you will have my little girls for neighbours. I think they will cheer you up. You're an old-fashioned little mortal, I think."

"Am I ?" said Sheba humbly. "I didn't know. I'm very sorry. Is it wrong to be old-fashioned ? Are no English girls like me ?"

"I fancy not," said her companion laughing, and glancing at her somewhat peculiar attire, which consisted of an old faded



cotton frock, not over clean, and far too short for her long and slender limbs, and a great flapping straw hat, brown in colour, and absolutely without recommendation in point of shape, or trimming.

"Who takes care of your little girls?" asked Sheba presently.

"Oh, they have an aunt, a sister of mine. She acts generally as governess and housekeeper," said Mr. Saxton. "You will like her. She has a way of getting on with girls."

Sheba gave a deep sigh. "Oh," she cried, "if only it was Monday! What time may I come, Mr. Saxton?"

He laughed. "Are you so impatient? Well, not in the day, I should say; it would be too hot. About this time, and I will bring you home. It is a mile, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said. "But I can come home by myself. I don't want any one to take care of me."

"Aren't you afraid?"

"Afraid?" she echoed. "Of what? There's nothing that can hurt one here!"

"Not kangaroos," he asked, "or dingoes, or any of those wild animals I have heard of?"

She laughed aloud, and turned back a little to her father, who was some paces behind, struggling with a refractory pipe. "Father," she cried, "Mr. Saxton thinks kangaroos and dingoes dangerous; fancy that!"

"He will learn better before he's lived a month at Crow's Nest," said Mr. Ormatroyd, joining them. "My dear fellow, there's nothing dangerous in the bush except snakes."

Then he bade Sheba run on in front while he and his friend talked business, and the girl obeyed, nothing loth, and began to hold commune with herself in her own peculiar fashion. "It is really as if I were waking up at last," she said, gazing rapturously at the blue sky, where, set low, and brilliant as jewels, gleamed the Southern Cross. "Let me see; first, three sweethearts—not that *they* count for much—then my book, my lovely, delicious, longed-for book! Then the news, then Mr. Saxton's arrival, and now my going to the Crow's Nest by moonlight. The one, one thing I have longed to do for years! Really to-night I think I am quite, quite happy. Oh, I hope—I hope—it will only last!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### AT THE CROW'S NEST.

THE Crow's Nest was a strange, weird, dreary-looking place. The house itself, built of stone, and with wooden roof and verandah, was a rambling one-storied building, set in a perfect wilderness of shrubs, trees and vegetation of all sorts. The garden had once been carefully cultivated, and still bore signs of past care in the

masses of roses, fuchsia, hydrangea and oleanders that shed perfume and brilliance everywhere, despite years of neglect. Fruit trees grew in abundance; pears, peaches, oranges, apricots, nectarines, plums, and the small and delicious-flavoured loquat covered acres of ground, and made a magnificent though wild and neglected orchard.

The verandah was smothered in passion flower and vine, now in a stage of fruit bearing. There were the usual amount of French windows opening on to it, but at present long years of tenantless desolation had imparted to the building a gloomy and neglected appearance. The usual wooden palings inclosed the grounds. A large gate hung loosely on broken hinges, and two unwieldy-looking vans were drawn up on what should have been the lawn, and some men were bearing in furniture and household goods through the open door which led into a large dark hall, from whence opened rooms of various shapes and sizes. A Chinaman was standing in the verandah superintending the men's efforts and exchanging a fire of "chaff" with them.

As the visitors approached he turned and greeted them with a low bow.

"Good evening, masters and missee," he said. "John do very muchee muchee. Come from Sydney this morning. Wash all floors. Makee all clean. Memble all big piecee orders."

"Is this your servant?" asked Sheba, delighted at the man's quaint appearance and expression.

"Yes, my cook and general factotum. My sister will bring a woman with her from Sydney, but this chap was highly recommended, and I think he will suit. He is a first-rate cook and a splendid gardener. That's just what I want here. It's so difficult to get servants."

"Yes," interpolated John, "me berry good cookee; makee much nice dish out of nothing; makee berry good garden. Chinaman makee better gardener than Englishee man. Englishee man no good—no good!"

"Well," said Mr. Saxton, laughing good-humouredly, "we'll see what you can do, John, by-and-by. Now let's go into the house and have a look at the rooms. I bought the place in Sydney and haven't the least idea what it's like."

Sheba flitted in, disregarded.

The house had a dreary forlorn look. The rooms were badly whitewashed, the mantelpieces of rough wood, and the windows were dirty and ill-fitting. There were no grates, only hearths; but Sheba was used to that, and it did not seem to her to warrant Mr. Saxton's exclamations of horror. She amused herself by disposing of the rooms to the different occupants. This was to be Mr. Saxton's; this, of course, his sister's; and this small one, with its long windows wreathed by thumbergia, would of course be Bessie's. There would be matting on the floor, and snowy

curtains, and a little white bed. She could see it all, and the face of its girl occupant. She stood there so long wrapped in a maze of fancies and speculations—"Sheba's dreams," her mother always called them—that she lost all count of time, and was startled at last at the sound of her father's voice calling her. He and Mr. Saxton were in the verandah.

"Come, child, we must be going," said her father. "It is nearly nine o'clock."

Sheba stood there a moment and looked round. The moon lit up all the wealth of fruit and leafage, the wild luxuriance of creepers and blossoms that scented the air with fragrance. Beyond lay vast depths of shadow, and through the still clear air came the rippling sound of a water-course.

"Isn't it beautiful!" cried the girl suddenly. "It is worth living, only to see such a night."

The two men looked at her; their faces were grave and anxious. They had been discussing matters of graver import than bush scenery.

"That child seems half a poet," said Mr. Saxton to his friend, looking at the young rapt face and deep and solemn eyes.

"She is very odd," said her father. "I can't think where she gets her fancies, and her passion for books. Her mother and I are prosaic folk enough."

Sheba was silent. But all the way home, and in her dreams that eventful night, she seemed to hear the echo of those words—"Half a poet."

Was it true? Could it be true? Had she solved at last the riddle of her strange nature—the secret of that inward craving, that terrible unrest, that made her thrill and tremble and desire and doubt where others simply lived and accepted, that made her long to drink deep full draughts of knowledge with lips of unquenchable thirst—that seemed to set aside such trivial things as feminine beauty and adornment, and almost deify the majesty and richness of mental gifts.

She lay there with the veil of the transparent curtains drawn round her bed, and gazed with solemn wondering eyes through the open window.

How still, how sacred was the night! Its rich scents swept up to her from the moonlit garden. Its mysteries spoke to her from the starry heavens. Her heart seemed to glow and exult. The young blood in her veins, thrilled by nature's magnetic force, stirred in passionate tumult and fired her brain with thoughts that were too wild, too weird, too vivid for utterance of commonplace words.

She sat up in her bed, and the rich masses of dark hair—her one beauty—veiled her in dusky glory; her eyes glowed like lamps of fire, and her heart beat so fast it almost frightened her.

Then from her lips burst one imploring prayer—the outspring

of this intense emotion, the very cry of her being to the divinity of its Creator :

"Oh, Spirit of Life, omnipotent and great ! Give me neither wealth nor beauty, nor any earthly gift, but a heart to feel and a mind to know, and the power to speak to others of all that Thou dost speak to me. Give me but this, and take all else of mine—heart, soul and spirit—to Thy service, and I will bless and love Thee now and evermore."

Strange prayer for childish lips ; for in years Sheba was but a child.

Strange prayer indeed of a poet-heart that future years might only crown with the thorns that are too sadly often the tribute of a woman's genius ! Strange, but yet not so strange, or so terrible as the answer which the Future was to bring.

Contrasts are the salt of life ; but the contrasts in Sheba's life did not possess much savour for her, and certainly the difference between her rapt dreams and passionate prayers of Saturday night, and the calm flat prose of the ensuing Sunday morning, was great.

First, after her cold bath came the ordeal of clean, starched, uncomfortable clothes. Then, every Sunday morning her mother made it a rule to brush, oil and plait that dusky cloud of hair which on week days streamed about her shoulders at its own sweet will.

Even at her best Sheba was a plain child, but with her hair shining and smooth and tightly drawn from her colourless irregular face, she looked positively ugly. However, Mrs. Ormstrody had strong ideas on the subject of "method" and "rule," and the girl, however inwardly rebellious at this torture, could but submit to it. A dark frown knitted her low brow, and anger and impatience flashed in her sombre eyes, but as their only result was a slap with the hair brush and the learning of a few extra verses of the regulation Sunday chapter, they did not seem of any great use, save indeed as a vent to her own ill-temper. For Sheba *was* ill-tempered—every one said so, even her sweethearts, who came and went like the seasons of the year—and she was usually more ill-tempered on Sunday than on any day of the week. She disliked going to church and sitting still and bolt upright in an uncomfortable pew, listening to a service every word of which she knew by heart, and a prosy, incomprehensible sermon, badly written and worse delivered, which it was one of her own and her brother's Sunday tasks to write out from memory and read to their parents in the evening. What advantage was derived from this peculiar infliction, Sheba had never yet discovered. Her parents evidently supposed it was a capital plan for enforcing attention to the sermon, but Sheba found out that so long as she remembered the text and the concluding sentence of the worthy old clergyman's discourse, her imagination and

fertility of thought might supply all other matter without fear of detection. Working upon this ingenious method, the girl wrote her own ideas of the sermon instead of transcribing the discourse itself, and often made it a great deal more interesting and certainly more original than that delivered by Mr. Payne.

On this special Sunday morning the heat was intense, and the very thought of sitting for two long hours in the little iron church was, to Sheba, hateful. But nothing except illness ever excused the smallest abatement of discipline or duty in the Ormatroyd household, and the infliction of her Sunday hat, a hideous, wide, unbecoming structure of white straw and pink ribbons, was added as the very crown of her day's martyrdom.

Poor Sheba! Her tightly-plaited hair, her stiff muslin frock, her hideous and uncomfortable hat, and hateful gloves, all donned to do honour to the day and the service by some mistaken and wrong-headed idea of the "fitness" of things. Probably in her loose comfortable cotton, with her hair in its customary state of freedom, her mind and temper both would have been more in unison with the thoughts and services of the Sabbath. As it was, she was in a state of rebellion that threatened to break forth in some awful breach of discipline before ever the day was over. She marched on between her father and Hex, each of them unfurling their white-covered umbrellas against the glaring sun. Mrs. Ormatroyd was not going to church that morning, being obliged to initiate the new domestic into the mysteries of cooking a sirloin of beef and a Yorkshire pudding—delightful viands for a sultry summer's day.

The sky was like a furnace; there was not a breath of air; Sheba panted as she lifted her colourless face to that glaring fervid blue. "How hot it will be in church," she said, glancing appealingly at her father.

"Not hotter than last Sunday," he said stolidly.

Sheba sighed resignedly and said no more. She resolved to think of her new friends all church time to make up for the martyrdom of attending it.

The little tinkling bell had just ceased as they reached the door. A very sparse and scant congregation were simmering on the wooden benches. All the windows were open, but there was absolutely not a breath of air, and the heat from the zinc roof (yclept iron) was almost intolerable. The service began. To Sheba's surprise a strange clergyman stood by old Mr. Payne's side, and she commenced speculating as to whether he would preach, and hoping, for the sake of change, he would. She took off her hat unobserved by her father, a thing she would never have dared to do had her mother been present.

How endless seemed the routine of the service, the standing and kneeling and sitting; how interminable the Litany, with its ever-running formula, "We beseech Thee to hear us." How

abnormally long the many hymns, accompanied by a wheezy old organ and a choir composed of three men and one woman, and in which the congregation languidly joined at intervals, when they felt up to the exertion. But at last sermon time came, and Sheba's eager eyes noted that it was the stranger who ascended the pulpit steps, and, marvellous to relate, stood up without the customary bundle of manuscript. Simply opening a small Testament, he gave out his text.

Sheba clasped her hands round her knees, an attitude peculiar to herself when interested, and gazed with wide absorbed eyes at the face above her.

A strangely delicate face—very pale, very grave, very earnest, but full of interest and promise; deep-set grey eyes, luminous with thought and power; and a voice, deep, rich, pathetic—a voice to give the simplest words effect and enchain the most heedless listener. She had never heard a sermon like it; plain, simple, but earnest as deep thought and consciousness of truth could make it. A sermon that she drank in with eager ears, yet which opened out a vein of thought that the speaker little imagined.

She glanced round once. Hex and her father were sound asleep. A faint smile stole to the corners of her mouth, but she touched her brother's arm warningly. "You won't be able to write the sermon," she whispered. "Come, wake up."

The boy rubbed his eyes. "Oh, don't bother," he said; "I can copy yours."

"I think you generally do," said Sheba austere. "Hush! it's over now. I'm almost—sorry."

## CHAPTER IV.

### SHEBA'S IDEAS ON THEOLOGY.

HOTTER and hotter grew the day. Sheba thought longingly of her "wilderness," but she knew it would be vain to ask permission to retreat there on Sunday.

From her early childhood Sunday had always been a day of extreme regulation; the morning tasks, the 11 o'clock service, the afternoon sermon, the evening readings and singing of hymns, and then—well, then, to Sheba, the one only delightful hour of the day, bedtime, when she could draw the mosquito-net round her and breathe with freedom and relief, and think of six days of more congenial occupation that would follow.

All this shows that she was by no means an exemplary specimen of a most exemplary method of "bringing up." There must have been a good deal of the "Old Adam," or rather "Eve," about Sheba. Certainly she never took kindly to discipline or religion,

or domestic instruction, though all had been administered to her with the very best intentions and on the most improved system. There was certainly no "sparing the rod," neither any "spoiling the child;" yet the result was not satisfactory. The fault, no doubt, lay with the girl herself, whose mind and nature were assuredly not of the "regulation" pattern, and therefore did not lend themselves kindly to received traditions of training.

She was somewhat of a riddle even to herself; she knew she wanted something out of life, but what that something was she could not explain. She sat now in the coolest corner of the verandah, her paper on a little wooden table, her pen idly tracing lines of all shapes and sizes on the blank sheet before her. The sermon had advanced no further than the text, although her brain was teeming with thoughts. Hex, who sat opposite, had already filled two pages, which it is only fair to say his sister had dictated, yet her own paper was blank. Her hand supported her cheek and kept back the thick hot mass of hair; her eyes, somewhat languid and heavy, turned ever and anon to the dazzling blue sky.

"I can't write in this heat," she exclaimed at last. "It is suffocating; oh, if only a storm would come!"

"And then you couldn't write in a storm," remarked Hex, "the lightning always frightens you."

"Not the lightning—the thunder. It is as if the whole sky crashed together. One almost wonders it doesn't fall to pieces with the shock. Did you ever think, Hex, that if it sounds so loud here, it must sound ever so much louder up there, in the sky itself. I wonder if the angels like it!"

This idea, presenting as it did the heavenly life in a totally new aspect, seemed to strike Hex as worthy of consideration. He laid down his pen, leant back in his chair and surveyed his sister critically.

"You *are* a rum girl," he said emphatically. "Whatever makes you think of the things you do?"

She shook her head. "How can I tell? They come, I don't want to think of them. They give me a great deal of trouble sometimes, and at night I often can't sleep, there seem so many thoughts coming and going in my head."

"I think," said Hex with stolid gravity, "that it's a great mistake to be always wanting to know everything, and the meaning of everything, as you do. Look at Eve now, see what she's done for us."

"I'm not at all sure," said Sheba audaciously, "that God didn't intend her to disobey Him from the very first. Else what was the use of making such a big world when there'd have been no one to live in it, and even if she hadn't eaten the apple, no doubt one of her children would have done it some day, and it would have come to the same thing in the end. Do you know, Hex," she went



on gravely, "there are some things in the Bible I really can't believe? It's no use saying we *must*, I'm sure I never can. Now just read that part about King Pharaoh and the Israelites. God distinctly tells Moses that He will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he *shall not* let the children of Israel go out of Egypt. Well, if God was so powerful and so clever, what chance had poor Pharaoh against Him? His heart was *made* hard by God, and then God punishes him with all sorts of cruel plagues. I call it most unjust."

"Perhaps," said Hex, "that part is not translated right. It may be something different in Hebrew."

"Then," said Sheba eagerly, "the very first time I see Mr. Payne I'll ask him what the exact meaning is—in Hebrew."

"I should," said Hex with a grin of delight, "for I don't believe he knows a word of it."

"Clergymen," said his sister rebukingly, "know everything about the Bible. What are they for, except to study and explain it to any one who wishes to know?"

"I'm sure," said Hex with a yawn, "I'd never want to know more than I was obliged. It's awful dry stuff, especially the Old Testament, and it makes out that God was as fond of fighting as Julius Cæsar, or—or Napoleon."

"I often wonder," said Sheba thoughtfully, "how there came to be *evil* in the world. Could God have made *that*? They say He made everything, and there was the serpent, you know? I should say to create wickedness you must know what it is yourself, yet God is supposed to be all goodness, isn't He?"

"Oh," said Hex, who hated his sister's theological speculations, "what's the good of bothering? There's God, and there's the devil; we don't need to know more."

"I think we do," said Sheba; "at least I do. The Bible doesn't explain half about the *real* beginning of the world. If God knew everything, He must have known Eve would sin, and what was the use of making her only to destroy her, and the human race after her?"

"Perhaps," suggested Hex with a sudden burst of wisdom, "He only set everything going just to see what would happen, and then left it."

"There's Cain and Abel again," went on his sister speculatively. "What harm did Cain do that his sacrifice should be rejected? To my thinking it was better to offer the fruits of the earth than to kill poor little harmless lambs and their mothers. Yet God accepts the slaughtered life and rejects the simple offering. It was not just, and I shall never think so, and it was the injustice that produced crime."

"Oh, my dear girl, do give up diving into subjects and speculating about them," exclaimed Hex. "Depend on it, no one is *meant* to understand the Bible. I never could, and I don't mean



to try. It's all very well for clergymen, and even they don't seem quite up to it. At least Mr. Payne isn't, that's certain. That's the best of Roman Catholics, now. They've no bother; their religion is all done for them. The priests prefer that they shouldn't read the Bible, but just believe as much as *they* tell them, and if they do any wrong they need only confess and get absolution. Well, I've done my sermon. See how much quicker I am than you."

"I suppose it is full of 'And he said's,'" remarked his sister; "varied by an occasional 'Then he observed.'"

Hex laughed. "Oh," he said, "they do to fill up. What are you looking for in the Bible?"

"An idea has just occurred to me," said the girl eagerly. "Of course we know that Genesis wasn't written at the time the events it describes really happened; not for hundreds of years after, perhaps. In that case I see some reason for that story of Cain's sacrifice."

"Oh, haven't you done with Cain yet? Well, let's hear it."

"The scribes were the priests after Moses' time," continued Sheba, "and they seem to have had a perfect craze for sacrifices and burnt offerings. Have you noticed that?"

"Yes," said Hex, slowly kicking his feet to and fro. "I thought probably they found those meat offerings useful for dinner."

"That's it, exactly," said Sheba triumphantly. "Perhaps in writing up the records they thought it would impress the people more if they found that blood sacrifices were more acceptable to God, and therefore twisted the story round to fit that idea. There was no one to contradict them. It seems impossible that all that early history can be accurate, when you remember it had to be handed down by word of mouth. I asked Mr. Payne about it the last time he was here, and he said that doubtless the records were more true in the spirit than in the letter. But he doesn't seem to like to talk to me about the Bible."

"I daresay not," grinned Hex. "You give him some posers to answer now and then."

He rose and stretched himself. "Are you going to begin at last?" he asked.

Sheba pushed back the thick hair from her brow, and drew the paper towards her. Then she began to write, her brother lazily watching her as she rapidly covered the sheets.

"How can you remember all that?" he said at last.

Sheba looked up. "Remember?" she said dreamily; "I don't know. I just put the text, then all the rest comes; one idea rushes after another, until it seems quite hard to stop."

"Are you going to do more than that?" asked Hex.

"Oh yes; lots. I feel just in the humour now."

"Well, I am going to find Billy, and have a walk in the garden," said her brother, pushing back his chair. "You'll find me there when you've done."

Sheba nodded and went on with her work, dashing off sentences and paragraphs at railway speed. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes sparkled. She looked a different being to the sallow languid girl who, but a short time before, had been tracing idle lines on the now covered paper.

Once her task was finished she did not read it over, but simply placed the sheets together, and then with a deep-drawn breath of relief snatched her shabby old garden hat from its peg and ran off to join her brother.

"Oh, if only it were not Sunday I might read my 'Arabian Nights,'" she sighed regretfully as she joined Hex and the goat and the tribe of dogs, who all seemed more or less oppressed by the heat, and were lying under the shade of the huge pear tree, which was the giant of the garden. "I'm so sick of 'Hannah More,' and 'The Pilgrim's Progress,' our only two Sunday books. I wish father would get some new ones from Sydney."

"Perhaps these new girls will have some," suggested Hex. "You'd better ask them."

"Of course I shall," said Sheba. "But it seems such an awfully long time till Monday, and Mr. Saxton said I must not go there till the evening. I wonder," she went on dreamily as she hugged her knees in her own peculiar ungraceful fashion, "oh, Hex, I do so wonder, what they will be like, especially Bessie. I've made up my mind she is to be my very own special friend."

"Have you?" said Hex. "Don't you think it would have been better to have waited and seen if she liked you first?"

"Liked me!" Sheba's face flushed, her eyes dilated. "Why shouldn't she like me?" she demanded fiercely. "I know I'm ugly, but that doesn't matter to a girl, and not very good-tempered, but I would try and be gentle and forbearing always with her." Then her voice broke, and a passion of tears quenched the blaze of wrath in her eyes. "Oh!" she cried tempestuously, "no one seems to care for me, no one understands me, not even you, Hex, though you are my brother. It seems to me as if some one, out of spite, had just picked me up and dropped me into a wrong place; I don't fit, and I'm always being scolded and punished, and I long, long, *long* to be loved; and mother seems to have quite a horror of me, and you don't care, and father seems half afraid to show any affection, and there I am. It would have been a great deal better if I'd never been born, I'm sure it would, or else if God had put me into some other family."

"What on earth are you talking about, Sheba?" demanded a voice behind her.

The girl started to her feet, the tears were still in her eyes, her cheeks burned with that crimson flush.

As she looked back at her mother's face, however, her own changed and grew colourless and subdued, and almost timid.

"Nice conversation for a Sunday afternoon," continued that severe rebuking voice. "I have heard what you said to your brother. Go into your room and remain there till tea-time as a punishment for your indelicate and almost blasphemous remarks. You shall not go and see those new girls at the Crow's Nest, to-morrow. You are not fit to be the companion of ladylike well-brought-up English children. I shall tell their father so."

Sheba's face grew white as death. She was accustomed to punishments and deprivations that were inordinately severe in comparison with her misdemeanours, and as a rule she took them with stoical indifference, but the injustice of this present sentence cut her to the heart. Without a word she turned away, but the very soul within her seemed to burn with black and bitter rage, and indignant passion.

"Oh!" she cried, when solitude allowed some safe vent for her outraged feelings, "oh, that I were grown up and able to do what I liked. Wouldn't I be revenged!"

Then she threw herself face downwards on the floor and cried herself sick and exhausted; and finally obeyed the summons to tea, a poor forlorn wreck of what should have been childhood; white, red-eyed and ugly, perfectly unable to touch food, which was put down to "bad temper," and to remedy which the learning of two extra verses of the Sunday evening hymn was prescribed.

"It is no use to kick against the pricks," said Sheba, in the depths of her rebellious heart. "But oh, how I loathe Sunday! Thank goodness, it's nearly over."

There still remained the ordeal of reading out her sermon, and as the time drew near for family prayers, Sheba began to feel distinctly uncomfortable. Memory gave her faint recurring stings; she had a distinct remembrance of some wild flight of fancy to which she had weakly yielded, and though she knew nothing about "orthodoxy" she felt convinced her account of the new clergyman's sermon was not strictly correct. She tried to take heart of grace, to re-assure her courage by telling herself that her father had slept throughout the sermon, and her mother had been absent. They would be none the wiser and she had done the same thing over and over again. Yet to-night, despite these assurances, she could not feel quite safe or quite comfortable as the dreaded hour approached. It had been one of her "bad Sundays," and everything had turned out wrongly; perhaps the sermon might be only another species of Nemesis, and behind it a whole category of punishments might be lying in wait.

Prayers were over. The ordeal must be faced. The two children rose from their knees, and, according to custom, went out to

fetch their sermons. Sheba walked very, very slowly along the wide verandah to the little table where lay her MS., badly written, blotted and untidy as usual. How could she attend to the details of penmanship when the Pegasus of imagination was carrying her off on one of those strange flights of fancy to which as yet she could give no name?

As she turned back with the papers in her hand, she heard the click of the great wooden gate falling to on its latch. She started and looked back. She saw two figures advancing—the bright moonlight showed their faces clear and distinct. Poor Sheba fairly gasped with horror.

One of the gentlemen advancing towards the verandah was Mr. Payne, the other was the strange clergyman whose sermon she was just about to read out, as a feat of her accurate memory and an indisputable proof of her attention in church!

## CHAPTER V.

### CAUSE AND EFFECT.

WITHOUT waiting to greet the visitors, Sheba rushed into the parlour, where Hex was already standing, sermon in hand.

"Oh, mamma," she cried excitedly, "here is Mr. Payne coming and the strange clergyman with him. We needn't read our sermons out before them, need we?"

"I do wish, Sheba, you wouldn't burst in on people in that impetuous way," exclaimed her mother crossly. "Sit down there by the piano, and you too, Hex."

The children obeyed. Hex laid his sermon down on the table, but Sheba grasped hers instinctively, and held it on her lap, while the blood came and went in her face and her heart throbbed wildly with shame and apprehension. She would be caught this time—there was no help for it. She thought of the "faith that could remove mountains," and wondered if by setting her whole soul and will on the averting of this catastrophe a miracle might result! As the steps approached, however, and the two gentlemen advanced into the full glow of the lamplight, her courage began to ooze away and with it the necessary amount of faith. She gave a little gasp of resignation and then remained quite still in her corner, an image of stony despair, only trusting her presence might be overlooked by some happy chance. A few moments passed, then Mr. Payne, who was a genial kind-hearted old man, glanced round and saw the two children, whom he knew very well. He immediately went up to them.

"Why, here is my clever little friend," he said encouragingly. "How do you do, Miss Sheba? Have you been writing my sermons as nicely as ever?"

Sheba stammered out something, she could not tell what, and the old clergyman, wondering at her unusual confusion—for Sheba was, as a rule, most self-possessed—took her hand and insisted on leading her up to his nephew, and introduced him to her as Mr. Noel Hill.

"This is a very clever little girl, Noel," he said, "and a very good little girl too. She is one of the most regular of my congregation, and she attends so well to all she hears in church that she writes the sermon from memory."

"Yes," interpolated Mrs. Ormatroyd, "that was my idea. I found it an excellent plan for insuring attention, and also impressing the valuable truths they hear upon my children's memories."

The new clergyman looked somewhat compassionate as his kind grave eyes rested on Sheba's downcast face.

"And have you written the sermon to-day?" he asked gently.

The poor child grew white to her very lips. Her eyes glanced up at him almost in terror.

"Oh, please don't ask me," she gasped. "It's nothing like—I mean it's not anything so good as what you said—and—and——"

"Sheba!" said her mother sternly, "be silent!" Then turning to Mr. Payne, she added: "The children were just about to read their sermons out when you came, but, for this evening, I will excuse them."

Sheba clasped her hands in sudden rapture, the papers fell at her feet. Quick as thought the young clergyman picked them up, and just as she was uttering an ejaculatory thanksgiving for her safety, his low deep tones broke the silence.

"If you will pardon me," he said, "I must express a great curiosity to hear these sermons; I never heard of such a plan before and I am sure the results must be excellent. As the sermons are here, do not let our presence interfere with the usual course of Sunday duties."

The colour flushed to Sheba's face, her eyes blazed with wrath and indignation.

"Why couldn't you let well alone?" she muttered, so low that he only just caught the words, and regarded her with even more curiosity than before. At the request Mrs. Ormatroyd looked pleased. Her system of religious education was of course perfect; still, it gratified her to have an independent opinion expressed of its efficacy.

"If you and Mr. Payne would really like to hear the children," she said, "they shall of course read out their sermons. Hex, you begin."

Hex grew extremely red in the face, but making a virtue of necessity, plunged into the text, and rattled on with scant regard

for punctuation, till he pulled himself up short at the end of the last page.

"Very good, my boy, very good indeed," said Mr. Payne affably, "you must have paid great attention."

Hex glanced at Sheba, a lurking grin about his wide mouth, but she was too perturbed to notice him. She had to face her own ordeal now, and as she stood there in the light of the lamp, her dark brows drawn, a burning spot on either cheek, her lips pressed close in sullen wrath, Noel Hill thought she made a strange picture of repressed rebellion, and watched her with keen interest.

She held the paper in both hands and stood for a moment looking down at it. Then summoning all her courage, and with a ring of defiance in her clear young voice, she began. For the first page all was well; at the second the young clergyman suddenly lifted his head and looked at her in wonder; at the third he smiled, at the fourth he grew grave. Had he indeed said such words as that clear childish voice gave forth so unfalteringly.

"For it is not always well," she read now, "to search into the realms of knowledge, to seek the real truth of Heaven's glories, or strive to pierce its veil of mysteries. Many of them may be fables, most are handed down as traditions and may be accepted as such. To a thinking, searching, thirsting soul it brings little comfort to picture a future spent in adoring incomprehensibility. Yet such is the vague and usually accepted idea of the Christian's Heaven. Quite as erroneous to reason, one would imagine, as that reverse side of the picture which paints hell all flames, and peopled by hungry devils! An all-seeing and all-wise mind might well be supposed capable of inventing a more rational system of reward or punishment. But half the world is content to accept without question, and the other half to scoff without proof. Between the two, if an eager inquiring soul puts out feelers of curiosity, it touches nought that is sure and little that is true. Yet every human soul needs a God. Something to appeal to, cry to, worship, reverence and trust. But God is far, far off, and the vast misery of the earth does not seem to trouble Him. One wonders how He can bear to gaze on so much woe, the results of a creation that ought to have been perfect, the outcome of what was planned and formed in His own image. Small wonder then if the philosopher and the thinker and the poet, looking out from some higher standpoint of thought than is reached by common humanity, should cry aloud with torn and anguished heart, 'Take back, O Great One, Thy gift of life, since life is only suffering, with death for recompense. Better the darkness and the void that first wrapped this strange globe in gloom, than the teeming burden of misery that never ends, of sins that are never pardoned, of hearts that are never at peace!' What is there in

the present? only pain. What in the beyond? only dreams; dreams that take the shape of men's thoughts and desires, yet even with their halo of divinity fail to satisfy the souls that ask for certainty."

The tones of her voice grew lower and more pathetic. Then she ceased. There was a moment's pause of blank astonishment. Mr. and Mrs. Ormatroyd looked at one another as if questioning the wisdom of discussing these extraordinary statements.

Mr. Payne murmured "Dear me! very clever, very clever. How well you read, my little girl."

But Noel Hill looked grave and almost pained. "Thank you, my dear," he said gently, as he laid his hand on Sheba's head. "I see you *do* go to church for some purpose." Sheba flushed and trembled at his touch. Would he betray her? She glanced up, and the passionate appeal in those great wonderful eyes touched him deeply. "Do not fear," he said very low, and then he moved away, and Sheba snatching up her MSS. hurried from the room without staying to wish any one good-night.

"What rum stuff you did read out," said Hex, as he lighted his candle by his sister's a few moments afterwards. "Did Mr. Hill really say all that? Why it didn't sound *Christian*, some bits of it."

"I don't know what he said," answered Sheba, half-laughing, half-crying, as she went into her room. "But he's a real good man, and he's saved me an awful punishment."

Sheba would have been still more surprised had she known that he had saved her from the task of future sermon-writing, for at the end of a long and grave conversation with Mrs. Ormatroyd, he told her that the girl had too excitable a brain for her years, and that religious subjects had evidently taken too deep a hold on her nature.

"She must think very seriously, far too seriously to be able to write such ideas as those I heard to-night," he said.

"But," exclaimed Mrs. Ormatroyd, "they were your own, were they not? She had merely committed them to memory."

Noel Hill felt as if he had put his foot in it. "To tell you the truth, my dear madam," he said, while his lips twitched despite their seeming gravity, "my sermon was extempore and I have not a very accurate idea of what I did say; your daughter seems to me to have done better than myself, and dealt even more daringly with my subject than I ventured to do. She must be very clever."

"Oh," said Mrs. Ormatroyd disparagingly, "she is well enough. But she is an extremely difficult child to manage. Her temper is something unbearable."

"These gifted children," said Noel Hill, "are often very troublesome and don't lend themselves kindly to discipline; you must let me have a talk to her now and then."

"With the greatest pleasure," exclaimed Mrs. Ormatroyd. "I should be only too delighted. I am so anxious to bring my children up on a really good sound Christian basis."

"Well," said the young man good-humouredly, "we will see what can be done with this talented young lady ; only, my first prescription will be, ' Knock off all sermon-writing.' "

(To be continued.)

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# TRAVELS IN LONDON

## IN SEARCH OF THE PICTURESQUE.

By PERCY FITZGERALD, F.S.A.

### PART III.

#### I.—STREET SCENERY.

THE most picturesque incident of London city streets is the perpetual recurrence of the lane of warehouses striking out of the busy highway, and which, narrow and lined by lofty warehouses, winds down where it can to the river. These alleys, not so long since, could be found in one long uninterrupted course from the Strand on to Wapping, but the embankment has cut off the earlier series. In the city nothing is so genuine or so truly mercantile as these not unpicturesque little descents, with their cranes, lofts, and waggons waiting below. One of the most picturesque vistas in London, and which suggests a portion of a foreign city, is the view down Fish Street Hill, the Monument rising on the left, the bottom being closed by the imposing and effective church of St. Magnus and its elegant steeple. A fine old tree blooms beside it. Hard by is the steep and gloomy St. Botolph's Lane, filled with its venerable and busy warehouses, every floor with its crane. Great waggons always stand crowded below, contriving to extricate themselves by some mysterious laws of the road. There is barely room for one to pass, while the procession of porters carrying fruit chests on padded cushions on their heads goes on ceaselessly. There is something pleasing in this old-fashioned shape of trade, and the whole suggests the traditional view of the London merchant and his business.

In this St. Botolph's Lane is a spacious court, with a fine imposing mansion, now a school, but which, the tradition goes, was the house of Sir Christopher Wren. It is a solid old structure, with flat roof and bold overhanging eaves, and a great overhanging doorway, approached by a flight of steps, sound, close and untouched. Another fine and imposing view, which gives the best idea of the state and magnificence of the Great City is to be found at a spot exactly in front of the Mansion House. Few reflect that from here no less than nine distinct vistas are to be obtained along nine distinct streets and alleys, each exhibiting something

impressive and worthy of admiration, and the whole offering contrast and variety. Add to this the tide of life running at its strongest, and the busiest "hum of men" conceivable. In front is the Mansion House itself, a heavy pile, of little pretension or merit, but which once presented itself under fairer conditions to the architect, for a broad and spacious row of steps led up to the front. This gave a more sweeping and graduated effect to the approach. But the demand for space entailed the sacrifice of the steps, and a wall was substituted. Beside it, a short street is terminated by the quaint airy spire of St. Stephen's, Walbrook, which contrasts with the rude stonework of the church itself. This is considered a gem in the way of church building, and was held by Wren himself to be his masterpiece. Next stretches away the comparatively new Queen Victoria Street, with its rows of stone mansions and blocks, the huge pile of the National Safe Deposit Company being conspicuous. Next to it opens up the busy Cheapside, with the stately and most original Bow Church half-way down, and projecting its friendly clock face over the street. Next, at right angles almost, comes another street, with a church at the end, and some banking houses built in the curious Soane style. Then interposes the Bank of England itself—a not unpicturesque structure considering its straggling shape. Then Threadneedle Street, with its vista of almost Venetian buildings, mostly banks—gloomy and massive, and straying from the level line with picturesque irregularity. Between it and Lombard Street rises the Royal Exchange, with its ambitious imposing portico of many pillars, commanding all issues; on its left, Lombard Street, with more dungeon-like banking houses. Half way down Cornhill, rising with a charming irregularity, is the showy tower of St. Michael's. Then between two streets stands a very unique and much admired church, that of St. Mary Woolnoth, set off by a luxuriant tree which projects its leafy branches over the street. Next comes King William Street, with glimpses of the "tall bully," the Monument, and at the end of the Sailor King's statue. And so the circle is complete. Let any one stand on the central Refuge as we have been doing, and turning, survey deliberately each issue, and he will feel surprised to find how much he has habitually overlooked, and how much there is to admire.

Just before arriving at Fleet Street we find Essex street. Old Smith and Peter Cunningham could furnish plenty of lore as to this name and the Earl of Essex: but with their work we have no concern. Half way down on the left, at the corner, we still find the "Essex Head"—the identical tavern where Samuel Johnson founded a club, considered of a "low" kind—and used to frequent it for a short time before his death. It is a grimed looking old place, with gaudy brewer's placard, which ill accords with the walls. One is always inclined to pause at this corner with a sort

of veneration. The alley to the left leads into the Temple, and offers a picturesque glimpse. The bottom of the street is closed by a large building with a gigantic arch, flanked by pilasters, and through which we get a glimpse of the Thames. From the arch there is a steep flight of steps down to the Embankment. This pile was one of the old Water Gates, where you no doubt could take a wherry. The street was once a highly "genteel" one, as we can see from the style of the houses: and, it will be noted, that there are four elaborately-carved doorways standing together, each of which offers a different pattern. Most interesting for the architect will be found a pattern of the old London house, Number 31, now a solicitor's office, and which shows an elegant variety of arrangement in a small space. We are so accustomed to the present monotonous arrangement that we are apt to think no other possible. The doorway and fanlight have a grace in spite of certain neglect that is unavoidable. We pass through the narrow passage—the parlour to the right, when we reach the hall, which is to the back, where the stairs, a short flight, rise to the right, returning again in a higher ascent, and thus mount after the "well staircase" pattern. The lightness and elegance of the whole is most pleasing, as well as its originality. The bannisters are of singular delicacy and airiness, carved into twisted rods, more rails than bannisters, while supporting every step is a triangular piece of carving, which increases the airy effect. Closing the end of the hall was the door of a room. To the artistic eye such a pattern of house is very pleasing and even refreshing.

It may be said that the old fanlight with its radiated divisions offered a various field for graceful fancies; in proof of which an artist not long ago took a promenade along the Old Kent Road and filled his note book with some forty or fifty specimens,\* all differing in their pattern.

## II.—THE OLD INNS OF COURT.

We mean by these the old inferior inns. Perhaps "Barnard's" is the quaintest and most old-fashioned of these places, from its irregular and even straggling aspect. Entering from Holborn, by a simple doorway, a little below its neighbour, Staple Inn, we pass the snug little porter's room, for it is no lodge, facing which is the truly effective dining hall, though "hall" is too ambitious a term for what is really a largish room. Yet how old, rusted and crusted and original it seems, with its steep tiled roof, and elegant little lantern and clock and the rest. The windows glitter as with diamond panes, and we can see the patches of stained glass in the centre of each. The small business-like porch is

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\* These are given in the *Builder*, and are surprising from the varieties displayed.

fitted on at the side, with its little iron gate in front, while round the tiny court are the good, sound old brick mansions. Beyond again is a glimpse of the trees, and a garden, rather forlorn, it must be said; beside which is a strange accumulation of old framed houses, all white and overhanging. These must be of very great antiquity and seem crazy enough. The life in these retreats must be strange with a sort of monastic tinge. Yet here "chambers" and rooms, &c., are to be had at low rates.

One of Dickens' happiest touches describes Thavies Inn, this curious little recess at the circus end of Holborn, "a narrow street of high houses like an oblong cistern to hold the fog." Of Barnards' Dickens seems to have had a poor and disparaging opinion, for it is described (by Pip) as "the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for Tom Cats."

Now that Barnards' is menaced with destruction, these grim descriptions are scarcely acceptable. The old air of desolation and abandonment is found poetical to a degree.

Staple Inn, protected by the well-known row of picturesque, overhanging houses, lately under actual sentence, having ceased to be an inn on its sale to the Providential Company opposite, has happily been again saved. This is really an interesting, pretty retirement; there is a strange charm in its trees and quaint old hall, which have evoked an abundance of sentiment, and prompted some graceful sketches. Many a stranger, and hurried American enters by the effective archway, leaving the din of Holborn behind, and changing of a sudden to unexpected peace, as of the country; anxious to trace the abode of the characters in *Edwin Drood*. Mr. Grewgius's chambers can be identified as Number 10 in the inner quadrangle, for it is described as "presenting in black and white over its ugly portal the mysterious inscription of P. J. T., 1747. Perhaps John Thomas, or perhaps Joe Tyler, for a certainty P. J. T. was Pretty Jolly Too." Landless's rooms are given with a graphic touch which recalls the whole place: "The top set in the corner, where a few smoky sparrows twitter in the smoky trees as though they had called to each other, 'let us play at country.'"

These old dining halls of the old inns have a certain character, with their lantern, clock and weather-cock; an honest dial generally, with bold gold figures that all the inn may read as it runs. Within, a business-like, snug chamber, with a great deal of panelling and a permanent "dinnery" flavour. They really give a character or note to the little squares in which they stand. These places are gradually dwindling, and in a few years will be extinct. One of the most forlorn is that of Clifford's Inn, which still lingers on undisturbed, though condemned and distributed years ago. There is a little unobtrusive entrance from noisy Fleet Street, where its little gardens, trees and bits of antique railing

come upon us, while the dining hall has a pleasing look through the old gateway in Chancery Lane, with its steep roof and stone balls and dressings.

Close by Bream's Buildings, out of Chancery Lane, there used to stand another inn, "Symonds'," which it is hard to call up again, yet it disappeared some dozen years ago, and figures a good deal in the legal scenery of Bleak House. "A little pale, wall-eyed, woe-begone inn, like a large dustbin of two compartments and a sifter. It looks as if Symonds were a sparing man in his day, and constructed his inn of building materials which took kindly to the dry rot and to dirt and all things decaying and dismal, and perpetuated Symonds' memory with congenial sadness."

Close by St. Clement Dane's Church are two not unpicturesque inns, Dane's and Clement's, but the latter has lost its retirement and privacy owing to the erection of the Law Courts. The old court yard of Clement's Inn, with its graceful-looking dining hall, has yet some significance. After having a piece added on, it has now become a printing office. Nowhere in London, however, is there a fresher and brighter patch of grass on which look down the sound and substantial old houses. There projects into the centre of this plaisance a ripe and effective old mansion, where tenants must think themselves far off into the country. A few years ago when the Corporation was dissolved, the leaden statue of Regulus supporting a sun-dial was purchased by an antiquarian member of the fraternity, and carried off. We must seek it in the Temple Gardens. Dane's Inn is separated from its neighbour only by a high railing and gate, so the whole seems one green pasture. It is but a gloomy retreat, with its dark chambers and giant houses, and its rude substantial dining hall like a small coach house. These places contain many a solitary studious man, who lives in them, tempted by the low rents. It was here that by a strange fate, self-imposed too, one of the important men of England died in sickness and comparative desertion. This was the late Mr. Chenery, editor of the *Times*, who it may be presumed fell a victim to the grinding labour of editorship and perpetual all-night work. There was something strangely tragic in this fate of one who had wealth and resources, but seemed driven slowly on to illness and death by the imperious engine which he had to direct.

To cover the general uselessness of these quaint old places, it was said that they received students and instructed them. In the last century this was actually carried out, and "Readers" gave lectures. And at Clements' Inn, up to a recent period, a reader arrived regularly from the Temple, who however remained for but one evening, when he was invited to dine and courteously entertained. There used to be a practice of holding what were expressively termed "moots and boulds" in the hall after supper,

when one of the ancients learned in Coke set points for discussion, which a student was required to answer. There was indeed something very quaint and interesting in the theory, at least, of these societies. Formerly there was a division of the upper table, where the "Antients" sat to the number of eight to a dozen. The lower table, where the students sat, were fewer in number. The Antients had the privilege of electing persons from the lower class into their body, which was done after a number of years' probation. It was impossible to discover any title or right in these persons beyond long custom, though trustees were appointed, whose title was as shadowy. They dined together at certain intervals, each person paying his own charges, in the mysterious little halls. But the whole interest in the institution is easily discoverable, and rested on certain profits divided among the Antients, and these depended on the rooms in the Inn, which as they fell vacant were disposed of, each tenant paying a sum down, usually about £400, for his life use of the premises. This sum was divided among the Antients.

Furnival's Inn, which faces its truly genuine companion opposite, is sadly modern, having been rebuilt about a century ago. Yet there is an old fashion about it. It will be remembered how the delighted young author was waited on here by the publishers in reference to his "Pickwick" and it is stated that his rooms were in "Number 15 on the right hand side as you enter." There is a certain attractiveness in the comparatively old and old-fashioned hotel, which fills the further extremity, and which has an air of snugness and comfort with its trees in tubs and cheerful *jalousies*. This arises from the perfect repose and retirement, the shelter from the hum and noise of Holborn outside. Outside there is one of the genuine old taverns, Ridley's Hotel, where people like Mr. Pickwick might descend at. Its bow-windowed coffee room and glass inclosed bars will be noted, as well as the dark stairs. There are very few of this pattern of tavern left, and where the old tavern life is pursued. There is one at the West End, in Glasshouse Street, which seems exactly as it must have been sixty years ago. Here are the old "boxes," the sanded floors, the coats and hats hung up, and the kettle on the hob.

The old London "coffee houses" are fast disappearing; even the name will soon no longer be known. There are several in St. Paul's Churchyard, which have a pleasant ring, such as the Chapter Coffee House, a portion of it over an arch that leads into Newgate Street. One notable hotel and tavern, more tavern however than hotel, stands, or used to stand, for it is now being rebuilt, at the back of St. Paul's Churchyard, and we must look at it always with a curious if not tender interest, for here it was that the young and brilliant Charlotte Brontë, coming to London on the business of her novels, put up, and received a first visit from her publisher. That gentleman was naturally astonished at

the friendless girl selecting such an incongruous abode, but there was here a sort of pleasant and native simplicity, for she had seen the name in the advertisement, and it sounded to her as being something tranquil and retired, possibly associated with the repose of canons and dignitaries. Close by, at Number 18, Newgate Street, is a tavern with associations even more interesting. This presents over its face an obtrusive inscription, "WHERE SHALL I DINE?" with its presumed answer, "RUDKIN'S TABLE D'HÔTE," while below a projecting shield, affecting a sham, antique dialect, declares that it is "Ye Olde Salutation Tavern." As is well known, here, towards the beginning of the century, used Charles Lamb and his friends resort and drink "egg-flip" and discuss poetry till "all hours." Later, poor Elia developed this taste to a degree, which has been good-naturedly disguised by his many friends and admirers.

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## D'EYNCOURT OF THE LANCERS.

By MRS. ALEXANDER FRASER,

AUTHOR OF "THE MATCH OF THE SEASON," "A FATAL PASSION," "GUARDIAN AND LOVER,"  
ETC., ETC.

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"What the years mean—how time dies and is not slain;  
How love grows, and laughs and cries and wanes again.  
These were things she came to know, and take their measure;  
When the play was played out so for one man's pleasure."

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### PART I.

MADAME DE MONTMORENCY.

SAVE for the above on a brass plate on the door, the house might be taken for a gentlemanly private residence. Its number is 200; its locale, Montpelier Road, Brighton.

It is decidedly a pretty and well got up house, with cool green venetians, and window-boxes brimming over with pelargoniums of all colours, and fragrant mignonette; but like a good many deceptions in this remarkably deceptive world, the interior in no wise corresponds with the exterior. The chief room, which is devoted to the "finishing" of young ladies, is, in fact, singularly devoid of all the little superfluities that minister to comfort, let alone luxury.

Madame De Montmorency goes in for asceticism, but her mode of carrying out this task is swayed by economy. The walls are sombre, with a paper that "does not show the dirt," and which is not grateful to the eye. Her chairs are straight-backed and spindley, and decidedly lop-sided, and her inky table hides its dingy face under a cadaverous sage-green cloth, on which bilious sunflowers are embroidered. Just now a glint of sun—and a glint of Brighton sun is usually bright—comes slanting across one big sunflower and makes it look of costly gold, and it also lights up two fluffy heads that belong to a couple of Madame De Montmorency's pupils, who stand side by side, peering out of the window at a little peep of dark blue sea, and listening to the waves' slow deep mellow voice, though probably at their age that voice, full of awe and mystery and moaning over its dead, has no particular attraction.



They are Madame De Montmorency's show pupils.

They are entirely "finished," and the two lovely faces are going to be sent out into the world, to be placed in frames—richly-gilded ones, if possible.

The elder girl—and her right of seniority is a palpable fact—is a magnificent brune. She has a clear glowing skin, and is ox-eyed, like Juno. Her face is after Roxalana. Heavy coils of blue-black hair crown her dainty head, and her tall well-developed form, even in a plain frock of homespun, is suited to a born empress.

There is something imperial, indeed, in every movement of Mildred Harcourt's limbs, in the turn of her white hands—lissome but large—and in the languid uplifting and lowering of the broad lids fringed by long thick lashes.

Alys Vernon is a complete contrast.

Of medium height and slight, she has a fair soft winning face, suggestive of a white rose, and a pair of eyes blue as the summer skies, that look out trustingly on the world, while a mass of hair, piled up high on her head, *selon la mode*, looks as if it had caught the sun's kisses and kept them imprisoned in its silken meshes.

The peculiar repose of Alys' manner is also a curious contrast to the other girl's, which is full of vivacity; but though they are complete antipodes, they are devoted to each other after the fashion of school girls, and as they stand, viewing a prospect, which by dint of being viewed for four years has grown very dull, their chief regret in leaving 200, Montpelier Road, is the inevitable parting from each other. Mildred, impressionable as wax, warm as a Brazilian sun, and possessing no more stability than a butterfly, occasionally forgets the pain of the coming parting in dreams of a grand future. She has made up her mind to be a duchess at the very least. Young as she is, admiration and flattery are meat and drink to her, and she is projecting a right royal repast of both stimulants, and she rouses out of visions full of glitter and triumph to notice that Alys is certainly absent, and has an irritating want of sympathy about her.

"You are not a bit more lively than usual, Alys," she says abruptly and rather crossly, "and it's close on our time for emancipation."

"And for saying good-bye to you. Don't you feel a little sorry, Mildred?"

"Of course; but you know we shall soon meet again, as Brighton is our *pied à terre*. Only think how jolly it will be to be our own mistresses, with nothing to do but dress well and look pretty. They say bread earned by sweat of the brow is thrice blessed, but give *me* the loaf of idleness. I should hate being the pattern early bird that picks up the worm, unless the worm was old De Montmorency, and I feel so ghoulish sometimes that I

could crunch her up, bones and all; and then, Alys, the horrible vulgar one-clock dinners, with old De M. in her inevitable mauve *moiré*, stiff as buckrum, smiling like a frosty sunbeam on the delicate eaters, and mildly hinting that a healthy appetite is one of the deadly sins of the decalogue; and to crown all, the daily trot down King's Road to Madeira Walk and back again, just like a pack of soldiers; but, oh, *à propos* of soldiers——"

Miss Harcourt pauses, to take stock of the cupboards in the room, lest there be eavesdroppers about, before she whispers:

"I saw *such* a beautiful one yesterday."

"Beautiful what?" Alys asks dreamily.

"Soldier—officer. He's one of the Lancers here, and I heard another fellow call him D'Eyncourt."

"Yes," Alys says quietly.

"Please wake up! I don't believe you have heard a word I have been saying."

"I have; something about an officer; D'Eyncourt you called him."

"And isn't it a lovely name! I *should* like to be Mrs. D'Eyncourt, awfully."

"Mildred!"

"I *should*; and he'd like it too, for he turned his head to look at me half-a-dozen times."

"Did he? But what does it matter, since you are not likely to meet him again?"

"Why not? I believe this D'Eyncourt is my fate," Miss Harcourt announces solemnly.

"Oh, Mildred, I *can't* believe you will let an unknown individual run in your head. We have got over the age of foolish school girls, and are supposed to be sensible young women beginning life in sober earnest."

"And an excellent mode of beginning life is to fall in love, providing it is with an eligible and he returns the compliment. Little goose, don't you know that love steadies the nature even if it confuses the brain? If I love any one he *shall* be mine; so that D'Eyncourt's doom is fixed. You'll see, Alys, if my words don't come true."

"I hope they will if they bring happiness with them," Alys says affectionately. "I love you so much, Mildred, I could give up my own happiness for yours."

"I think you would, little silly; you are just the sort to immolate yourself on the altar of friendship. Now I couldn't go so far as that. I would do a lot for you, but I could not give up a man I had a fancy for to any living woman," Miss Harcourt answers carelessly, little recking that these words of hers are a fiat of woe to a loving woman.

## PART II.

## THE SPIDER AND THE FLY.

FOR two months and a half of the London season Miss Harcourt is the belle. Every roughness is smoothed, every bramble eradicated from her glowing path, and her eye is delighted by a smiling and velvety surface.

Society—great autocrat—acknowledges her a tremendous success, and worships her as much as she has expected to be worshipped. The royalties look pleasantly on her as she makes a sweeping courtesy before her Majesty—a picture in her white robes and trailing water lilies. Her fast little speeches delight the men and are retailed spitefully by the women. Her toilettes are copied, and she is the centre of an adoring group of the sterner sex in the Park and the Row, at Hurlingham and Henley, at the Derby or Ascot.

But the duke she has promised herself has never turned up, neither has one eligible asked her to accept himself and his belongings.

Out of conceit with the "world," Miss Harcourt leaves town a little disappointed, but not disheartened. She is rather glad to go back to Marine Parade, where her mother owns a house. The sea will bring back the roses she has lost on the treadmill of society, and by the time the Brighton season begins she will have regained her brilliancy of beauty.

Mrs. Harcourt is not wealthy; but it would be difficult to detect any paucity in her funds, for the dashing widow and her daughter are habitually to be seen in frocks that the *atelier* of Julie Swaebe would gladly own. And then there is a charming combination of soft rose and silver-grey pervading the drawing-room at Marine Parade that indicates a substantial account at Coutts'. It is all that the French call "*poudre aux yeux*," but it does not signify, since it takes in the public, and that is the result at which the inmates aim.

And then, being the widow of the Honourable Mr. Harcourt (dishonourable Mr. Harcourt, financially speaking), Mrs. Harcourt and her daughter know the "cream of Brighton," such as it is. If heart forms a portion of Miss Harcourt's anatomy, it has remained intact during her London campaign. In fact, she has never forgotten the face that caught her fancy before leaving Madame De Montmorency's, and a pair of deep grey eyes and a careless smile have haunted her through all her town dissipation.

The impression they have made is not singular, since these eyes, which are undeniably handsome ones, added to the thorough-

bred face and tall *svelte* figure, have made others besides Miss Harcourt think again and again of Rex D'Eyncourt.

He is nicknamed Rex because he is such a king among women, but his godfather and godmother christened him Vere.

It is with a palpable flutter that Miss Harcourt finds herself again in the place where the hero of her imagination is located. But for two long months she seeks vainly for a sight of him; up and down, up and down the sea front, up and down East Street, at the Sunday parade, even as far as Preston. But Rex D'Eyncourt has gone on leave to Scotland, and among the grouse and the bonnie lasses is enjoying himself thoroughly.

Presently, when October comes, the very first big ball given is by the Lancers, and it naturally happens that Rex, the most popular man and best *valseur* in the room, should be presented to the most beautiful girl and best *valseuse*. Dance after dance sees them together, and destiny being at work, Rex D'Eyncourt asks permission to call at Marine Parade.

When the ball is over, Miss Harcourt goes home in the fly with her mother. She feels satisfied with her evening. Her cheeks glow and her eyes sparkle, and it is a pity it is dark and no one is by to admire her exceeding beauty.

She is convinced she is in love, and before she goes to sleep she kisses her own hand, the hand that Rex had clasped just an hour ago.

Meanwhile, in his quarters at Preston, Rex lounges indolently in an American chair, smokes a tolerable cigar, and sends a thought to his flirtation of the evening.

But he is not struck with her. The new girl is only one of ever so many who have appeared to like his society. Her great eyes, like southern meteors, have ignited no real spark in his breast, and with the remnant of his "weed" he flings aside her memory and sleeps as well and soundly as a baby, his dreams unpeopled by houris with black orbs and twinkling feet.

Meanwhile Miss Harcourt has not slumbered as well as usual, and is up betimes, counting the hours till four o'clock, at which time "he" (she has already begun to call him "he") told her he would call. At 3.30 she goes downstairs to assume an elegant but studiously careless pose in the pretty drawing-room, that, denuded of its brown holland swaddling clothes and grand in rose and silver-grey, looks quite imposing. She is gowned in simple white muslin, with just one deep red rose nestling at her throat, giving the single gleam of colour that is the acme of taste and art, and she need not be apprehensive that the visitor will fail to appreciate her.

Rex D'Eyncourt is no Don Juan, but he is a keen admirer of beauty, and a judge of it as well, and in the first glance he realizes that the daylight, usually a severe ordeal, suits this new girl to a T. To him she is ten times prettier in her virginal

snowy gown than in the forget-me-not tulle and crystal of the night before, and if she has lost some of her animation she has gained, what is more dangerous, in softness.

In a little while the Honourable Mrs. Harcourt drops in, naturally and gracefully. She is not much beyond forty, her face and figure are well preserved, and she has to an unusual degree the art of making herself agreeable.

So when a good deal of tea and thin bread-and-butter have been discussed, Rex makes his adieux, and leaves with a determination to cultivate as much as possible these charming new acquaintances of his. The fact is that he never dreams of danger. He is so much accustomed to being allowed to lounge about in easy chairs and sofas in pretty drawing-rooms, he has been such an *enfant gâté* of the sex ever since he was nineteen and underwent his first drill, that the affability of Marine Parade comes to him as easily as his post-prandial cigar.

The shadow of love, and above all of marriage, never flits across his brain. He is well off—the best off in the regiment—and he is his own master. There is not a soul to deter him from wedding even Dollie Brown, who under the name of Rosabel Mortimer enchants the eyes of the golden youth with her evolutions in the pantomimes. But Rex is essentially a bachelor.

He looks on matrimony as one of those awful ailments, such as smallpox or typhus, to which human nature is subject, but which with due precaution may be avoided.

He is no misogynist; far from it, for if there's a flaw in him, it's weakness towards women. But he loves his club, his hunting and shooting, and even his regimental life, too much to care for the appendage of a wife. Besides, he has never met any one yet—and he is seven-and-twenty—who has succeeded in rousing in him any feeling but an ephemeral one.

Poor Rex! He little knows that a council of two have decided his future for him already.

Before long he finds himself an adjunct at Marine Parade, without whose advice no trivial subject can be settled. It is certainly a trying post for a young fellow—the post of oracle and mentor to two lovely women, who seem to be so thoroughly helpless as the Honourable Mrs. Harcourt and her daughter. It is a post that caters so tremendously to the vanity innate in men. It is a subtle and intoxicating flattery which is hard to resist, and it is the mother and daughter's trump card. Mildred sings tender love songs to him in a rich contralto that Madame De Montmorency has had well cultivated, and her ox eyes confirm the words on her scarlet lips, and she lingers beside him on the balcony when the moon is at its full.

Still Rex keeps his head, and never utters a word that can be construed into love, and the end of the season finds the beautiful Miss Harcourt a little listless and weary. What is the good of

her beauty, since it is going to fail her now? And she is very sore, knowing that the other Brighton girls, who have seen her game, will laugh at her failure in catching the handsomest and richest man in the — Lancers.

Vexed at his holding back like this, she grows petulant and uncertain, and Rex, haughty and sensitive, and wholly unused to a social atmosphere that waxes hot and cold, avoids the house.

A week elapses—seven weary endless days—without a sign of him, and Mildred pines and raves by turn; while Rex, ensconced in an emporium of pipes, whips, portraits of racers and dancers and all the other trifles that bachelorism affects, forgets her very existence, immersed in a new book of travel in Japan, a journey to which he has dedicated the first long leave of absence he can get.

A tiny note, fragrant of wood violets and familiar to his nostrils, reaches him. The first sensation it creates is boredom, but destiny is working still, and he accepts the invitation, and in due course finds himself installed in his old place at the *chic* little dinner, with Mildred beside him, temper flown (she has seen the folly of it), and infinitely prettier for the slight shadow that hangs over her.

When the repast is finished Mrs. Harcourt vanishes, and Miss Harcourt knows that her hour has come.

Conquest or defeat is close at hand.

There is an awkward silence, during which Rex manufactures a refractory cigarette and Mildred listlessly turns over the pages of a *Lady's Pictorial*.

Suddenly he looks up and catches a glance that sends the blood to his cheek. Yet it is only a reproachful glance, and she bows her head over the paper.

But Rex has seen something. It is a—*tear*!

Tears are her best weapons. The sight of them calls up all the chivalric feeling in his nature, and blinds him to the folly of yielding to pity when that pity is *not* akin to love. It is all over. With his head bending over her, and the pained look in his grey eyes at her evident suffering, Mildred strikes while the iron is hot. Her slender hand creeps into his, and her head drops on his shoulder.

Rex lets the head, with its wonder of shiny tresses, lie there; but the contact brings no gratification to him. He believes it is his bounden duty to say something, but for the first time in his life he is all astray, and both eloquence and presence of mind desert him.

Meanwhile, having achieved her desire, Mildred weeps, but for joy. True, there is wormwood in her cup, for she is no fool, and she knows this has been none of his seeking, and that only by art she has beguiled him thus far; but she believes Rex to be absurdly sensitive as regards what the world calls honour, and that

though he has uttered no single word to bind him, yet this scene will to a great extent hold him to her.

With all her inordinate vanity, a vanity which has been born with her, and fostered by her mother into a huge Upas that sheds its baleful influence over her whole mind, Miss Harcourt is more knave than fool, and she does not deceive herself as to the lamentable fact that she is the wooer and not the wooed, but she salves her conscience by the thought that love *must* come to him later. How could it be otherwise when *she* is his wife?

"Miss Harcourt," stammers poor Rex, in a hesitating voice, while he still clasps her hand, just because he has not the moral courage to put it away from him. He is like a good many soldiers—brave as a lion and tough as an oak, except to women. And though he knows she is scarcely as reticent as she should be, he cannot bear to wound her. "Are you ill, or anything the matter? Has anything happened to vex you?"

A commonplace speech, and a stupid one; maladroit, like his sex, he has stumbled on the very leader she wants, simply because he is worried and perplexed and in a regular hole.

"Nothing, only—" and Miss Harcourt, with a cleverness which is luckily rare in girls, throws a husky pathos into her voice—"I have been a little upset, you know. It was awfully silly of me, but I could not help it," and she looks up pleadingly; "you see we have not met for a whole, *whole* fortnight, Captain D'Eyncourt—*Rex!*"

His nickname is breathed so low and so softly that Rex is not startled by its familiarity. He glances at his companion's face, at the fresh scarlet lips that call him "*Rex*," and he finds Niobe transformed into Hebe. A warm peach bloom has flown back to her cheek, and her great eyes shine like twin stars. He has been all over the world, and just now the girl's beauty seems to eclipse any beauty he has looked upon. Yet he is untouched; he does not lose his head, much less his heart. He thinks he would like to invest a hundred in a true likeness of the face so near his own—a likeness that he could hang up in his room and christen Circe, Cleopatra, or even Delilah, according to fancy, but not for a moment does he covet the original.

Miss Harcourt pauses to see what manner of response her avowal will elicit. It would be dear incense to her vanity if Rex would but take the initiative and make violent love to her. The inflection of voice in which she had murmured "*Rex*" ought to have reached his ear, but when he sits as dumb as a sheep she thinks it quite time to go on.

"Do you know, I really began to believe that you had forgotten us altogether, or worse, that the friendship which had become my greatest happiness had become flat, stale and unprofitable to you."

"*Friendship!*"

At the word, Rex revives at once. His courage, which has



collapsed at the bare idea of sentiment, rears its crest aloft at the Platonic sound, and "Richard is himself again."

"How could such an absurd idea enter your head? You *must* know, dear Miss Harcourt, that the hours I have passed here have been most pleasant ones."

"Dear Miss Harcourt!"

The crushing amicability expressed in these words awakens her at once to the risky position she still has, and she flings herself back on the rose and silver-grey sofa and abandons herself in the precincts of an embroidered handkerchief to a couple of deep but tearless sobs, while Rex looks on in amazement, and devoutly wishes the house would catch fire or something, so that he could get clear of the place. But fate is dead against him.

"Pray let me call Mrs. Harcourt. I am sure you are——"

Call her mother! It *would* be a fatal climax!

"No! No!" she answers quickly; "I am not ill, only hurt!"

"Surely I have not said anything to hurt you. I would not hurt you for the world, you know."

"Then you *do* care for me just a little?" she cries delightedly.

"Yes," he answers; and what else can he say.

"Oh, Rex, I *am* so glad! I care for you too, I cannot tell you how much, and these Brighton people have been talking about us awfully, and poor mamma has been nearly distracted about it. She will be so happy to hear this."

Hear what? Rex feels that his time has come, and bows to his unlucky fate. His face is very white and set, and there is not a pleasant expression on it; the careless smile that is wont to fascinate so many women has left his mouth, and his deep grey eyes wear a cold steely look. He knows quite well that this girl, with her arts and wiles and clinging arms, has fairly caught him, and he thinks that if a man had let him in like this he would give him a sound thrashing. But his enemy is a woman, and he is powerless. He ought to have left directly the signals of distress were hoisted. Now it is too late. Miss Harcourt brought her best ally to the fore when she said the Brighton gossips had been busy with their names. He has punctilious notions on this score, and so he resolves to plunge boldly into the cold water bath awaiting him, although the very notion of it makes him shiver all over.

"Mildred!"

He speaks the name gravely and sternly. He is not of the type of young England that grow familiar on short acquaintance. He has always known the girl as Miss Harcourt and thought of her as Miss Harcourt, and even when he says "Mildred," there is no pretence of tenderness in his tone. On the contrary, it sounds disagreeably chilly and sarcastic as he consents to immolate himself on the altar of "honour."

"If you *do* care for me, and you really think that marrying

me will be for your happiness, I'll do my best to make a good husband, not that matrimony is much in my line," he adds with a curt laugh that has a good deal of bitterness in it.

Miss Harcourt is not thin-skinned, or she would feel rather uncomfortable at this very unloverlike speech; but she only feels perfectly satisfied at her success.

"If I care for you! I have cared for you since the first minute I set eyes on you. To be your wife, Rex, is all I desire in the world!"

"So be it," returns Rex. But sweet and red as are her lips, he never attempts to seal his trothplight, and is charmed when Mrs. Harcourt enters with an unconscious air, though she had been listening at the door for the last ten minutes.

"Kiss me, mamma," Miss Harcourt cries; "I am the happiest, jolliest girl living. Rex and I are going to be married!"

"*Married!* Oh, my darling Mildred, I *am* so glad!" And Rex looks on with a dreadful conviction of having been sold, and an utter repugnance to all this kissing and congratulating.

"One thing I must beg of you both," he says presently, in a voice quite unlike his own; "it is that no one shall be told of the engagement until I wish."

He does not look like a man to be disobeyed, so, angry and disappointed, the Honourable Mrs. Harcourt and her daughter are forced to acquiesce.

### PART III.

#### LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM.

"ALYS, some one to make your acquaintance who ought to have been here long ago. Here he is, the son of my dear old friend. And I have not known of his existence all these months that the regiment has been quartered so near us. Never mind, my boy," and General Vernon administers a slap on his companion's shoulder, "we must make up for lost time, and here's my little girl, who will welcome you as cordially as I do. Shake hands, pet, with Captain D'Eyncourt."

D'Eyncourt! She remembers the name well; it was the name of Mildred Harcourt's adorer.

She stands without offering a word of welcome—a little slight white witch with fluffy golden hair and big startled eyes—and Rex doubts if he *is* welcome, until he catches a full glance from under the curly lashes.

In the twinkling of an eye these two, Rex D'Eyncourt and Alys Vernon, fall desperately in love with each other, and it would have been better if Rex had not desired the concealment of his engagement, for Alys will not hear of it.

Her intimacy with Miss Harcourt died out long ago—their lives were so dissimilar, and Alys soon found out that her father did not like the acquaintance.

It is only three weeks after she has known Rex that she asks if he knows Miss Harcourt, and his answer is so short and indifferent that she never dreams how well he knows her.

But with the knowledge that he is bound hand and foot by a sense of honour, Rex has no right to lounge in his lazy way so often into the pretty drawing-room of General Vernon's villa in Arundel, and to sit hour after hour with Alys.

He seems to like sitting here, a little aimlessly, never saying much or even appearing happy, for Alys often sees his brow contract and a heavy shadow creep across his grey eyes and his handsome mouth, and she wonders what ails him, and longs to have the power to chase the shadow away. She yields up her heart to him without a struggle to keep it back—her future looks so clear and serene. Golden hope and rosy love make the earth a paradise, and she goes from day to day, her fair face blushing beneath Rex's fervent gaze, her little hand fluttering like a bird at his touch.

Of course Rex sees it all. He reads the virgin page of the heart on which one name is inscribed—his own—like an open book. He is not dishonourable, yet he cannot resist quaffing the sweet draught Alys holds to his lips. He cannot put away with his own hands the delicious incense of the love she reveals in every word and glance. All he can do is to keep back the burning protestations which rush to his lips, and to refrain from taking the little girl in his longing arms whom he has found out to be his beau idéal of woman nature.

Miss Harcourt and Alys are as different as darkness and light, but Rex never attempts to make any systematic analyzation or philosophic *résumé* of their respective merits. Their images are as wide apart in his fancy as their natures are in fact.

It is not long before Captain D'Eyncourt's frequent visits to Arundel become a matter of discussion. His good looks and his wealth have made him a marked man to the feminine portion of Brighton, and his movements are freely commented on.

Miss Harcourt hears the gossip with a cheek that is deadly white, and with clenched hands that tell of anger and jealousy.

It is a Miss Vernon who is supposed to be Captain D'Eyncourt's attraction, and she remembers that Alys had told her long ago that her father had a country house at Arundel.

She determines to go at once to the fountain head. All she has need to do is to show Alys that Rex is hers—hers by right of troth—and that she is determined to hold him to his word.

Alys is alone. She is changed a little in these latter days; her face is very white and her eyes have lost their sunny look. It is days since she has seen Rex, and her whole soul is absorbed

in seeking reasons for his absence when Miss Harcourt, unannounced, stands before her—Miss Harcourt with a hard cruel face that frightens her.

"What is it, Mildred?" she asks nervously; and then she holds out her hand, but the hand is rejected scornfully.

"What is it, Mildred?" she asks again.

"The matter is that you are treacherous and mean! That you are trying to take Captain D'Eyncourt from me—that you are using every art to secure him for yourself!"

Using every art! Alys knows no arts; and it is this very blessed ignorance that has won for her the love that Miss Harcourt, with all her worldly guile, has failed signally to gain.

Alys is proud in her way, and she answers with a dignity that rather amazes the other girl.

"I am not trying to 'secure' Captain D'Eyncourt; but even if I were, I do not see what concern it is of yours!"

"What concern it is of mine? Good heavens, are you mad?" and Miss Harcourt paces the room with rapid strides.

Then she stops and faces Alys—Alys who grows whiter and whiter, whose heart seems to stand still as she questions herself, "Can he be anything to Mildred?"

She feels a dead weight settle down on her. An instinct tells her that her sands of happiness are run, and Miss Harcourt's dark eyes full of anger cast a blight upon her; Miss Harcourt's tall figure, swaying in her excitement, seems like a giant shadow on her life.

"Alys, do you consider it right or honest to see Captain D'Eyncourt, to encourage him, to do your utmost to make him act a traitor's part to his affianced wife?"

"His affianced wife!" stammers Alys with shaking lips; then a momentary unconsciousness steals over her.

"The knowledge that Captain D'Eyncourt is engaged to me seems to have a strange effect on you," sneers Miss Harcourt.

"Pray, is he anything to you?"

"Nothing!" answers Alys. And though her heart feels broken she gathers up enough courage to reiterate, in a firm voice, "Nothing!"

And it is true, for Rex is nothing to her *now*.

"Captain D'Eyncourt is a friend of my father's, that is all."

"Women don't turn white and faint when they hear that a friend of their father is going to be married. Alys, you can't deceive me, and I don't blame you, for you have acted in ignorance, but I do blame Captain D'Eyncourt. He has behaved shamefully and dishonourably in making love to you."

"He has never said a word of love to me in his life," Alys asserts positively.

She knows that the lord of her idolatry has turned out very imperfect clay after all, that deceit lies heavily at his door, but

woman-like her only wish is to exonerate him in Miss Harcourt's eyes.

"Alys, will you send Captain D'Eyncourt away from you now that you know he belongs to me?"

"I will send him away."

Miss Harcourt knows that the girl is truthful down to the very bottom of her soul.

"Thank you," she says carelessly. "And mind, if you do not keep your word I shall make a public scandal; I give you warning that I am going to watch over what I consider my own property. I'll have no tampering with his feelings. I'll stand no rival in his heart. His heart is really *mine*, I know it; and do you think that *you* or any other woman has the power to take away a man *I* love?" she adds with crushing arrogance.

Alys answers nothing. White and motionless as a statue she listens to all that the jealous implacable woman has to say, and with a stricken look in her eyes sees her leave the room. She rises slowly, and going to the window watches the figure of D'Eyncourt's future wife until it is out of sight.

Then she goes quietly up to her own room to cry, lest her old father will find out that her heart is broken.

#### PART IV.

"SHE WILL NEVER TELL YOU AGAIN THAT SHE LOVES YOU!"

REX makes his appearance the afternoon following Miss Harcourt's visit, and Alys receives him as usual, though even *his* coming does not bring the colour to her face or the light to her eyes. He looks at her keenly; something has gone wrong with her, but what he has no suspicion of.

"Come out on the river," he says, "a row will do you good."

She assents a little unwillingly, but yet she cannot bring herself to refuse him. So putting on her hat she walks beside him silent, and to his thinking a little cold.

Rex springs into the boat and pushes it close to the shore, then he turns and holds out his hand to assist her in. The river, with the sunlight gilding its current, flows quietly by; the drooping foliage that fringes the bank looks dark and mysterious. The little craft rocks on the water as Rex bends forward, but still the girl hesitates, and in her heart wishes she had not come.

"Alys, come!" he says softly. He has never called her by her christian name before, and his voice thrills through her veins as she listens. "Why are you hesitating to-night? Do you not remember how many times we have gone for a row?"

"I remember," she says in a low trembling voice, and she

presses her hand to her heart as a sudden spasm turns her faint and cold.

"Then why delay now? Alys, let us have a happy hour. It is little to you, perhaps, but so much to me; come."

So Alys goes. It seems so little to do for him, and she feels that she cannot resist one more taste of happiness, one dream of Heaven, before it is put away for ever. In another moment they are gliding down the stream. It is a day full of magical beauty. For a little there is silence; then Rex says suddenly and passionately, "I wish you and I could drift away to a home and life of our own!"

Alys starts. The voice more than the words tells her she is unwise to be here; but before another instant, Rex is bending over to her, his face close to her own.

"Alys, you don't want me to tell you how I love you! Oh, my darling, my child, you must know it! You can see how love has mastered everything, and made silence out of my power!"

Her breath comes in short quick gasps and a mist rises before her eyes; but she is very plucky, in spite of her fragile organization.

"Don't make me regret coming this afternoon, Captain D'Eyncourt," she says quietly. "What is the object of these wild words—surely you are not laughing at me for amusement?"

He looks at her aghast. She has never spoken like this to him, his blue-eyed soft little darling.

"Are you angry with me for telling you how I love you, Alys?"

"Yes!" she cries, forcing a flash of resentment into her voice. "Do you think I am only fit to be a toy? You are engaged to Miss Harcourt, and yet you dare to talk of love to me! What am I to think?"

"Think that Miss Harcourt is nothing to me, while you are everything," Rex answers, with uncontrollable passion in his accents.

"Captain D'Eyncourt!"

The name bursts from her almost in a moan. She has the strictest notions of a man's honour, and it hurts her that this man, whom she has placed on a pedestal to worship, should show a weak point in his nature.

"I fling Miss Harcourt and every thought of her to the wind. I am yours, Alys—my Alys! And it is for you to say what you'll do with me!" he cries vehemently.

"And your *honour*—where is that?" she asks faintly.

"My honour is safe in my own keeping," he tells her haughtily. "I break no faith in breaking with such a woman as Miss Harcourt. I have found out what she is, and you cannot blame me if I put her out of my life without even a consideration."

"But I *do* blame you! A man must not break his word.

You have said words to me this evening, Captain D'Eyncourt, which you ought not to have said ; but we can both forget them."

"A man cannot forget what his heart is full of, Alys. What ails you to-night? Only the last time we met I could have sworn that you loved me!"

Again she feels the short sharp pain at her heart. In a moment she forgets Miss Harcourt ; she only remembers that his eyes look into her own—that Rex loves her.

Then she realizes that she must by her own fiat send him away from her.

"You have no right to speak to me like this!"

"I *have* a right—the right that *love* gives, Alys!" And he drops the oar and seizes her fragile hands. "You love me, too, and by that love I swear none but you shall be my wife!"

"Hush!" and she tries to draw away her hands. "You are cruel to say such things, and I am wrong to listen."

"*Don't* you love me, Alys? My little Alys! For God's sake don't tell me that I have deceived myself!"

He sees a shiver pass over her, and her small face—pale and pure as a lotus flower—grows even more pale and pure under the golden rays.

"I may have cared once," she begins ; for she dares not tell an untruth to this man whom she is worshipping, even now, in spite of his duplicity, with her whole soul.

"Once!" His handsome face shadows and his voice shakes like a woman's. "Once! and not now?"

She does not answer, but looks away from him and gazes down wistfully on the water that shines up opalescent under the sun's light. Then she raises her glance to him, and he can see drops glittering on the long lashes, and such a depth of sadness in the pretty blue eyes, that he feels like a criminal for having brought it there.

Suddenly Alys speaks. "*Don't* make it harder for me, Captain D'Eyncourt. I am very miserable, I know, but I *can't* forget that Mildred Harcourt was my friend once, and I cannot be the traitor to her that you wish me to be."

Then she breaks down, and bowing her face on her hands sobs like the child she is.

Each of these sobs cuts him to the heart like a knife, and Rex grows desperate. Once more he seizes her hands, and covering them with vehement kisses, holds them tightly clasped in his own.

"You need not think I shall let you go out of my life, my pet! my darling! No man can give up without a struggle the thing that is the dearest, most precious to him in all the world. I love you, Alys. I have never loved any one before, and I shall love you always—always! Do you think, then, that I shall let you go? Come, my own, forget Miss Harcourt ; forget everything except



the blessed fact that you and I love one another, and nothing and nobody shall come between us two!"

He passes one arm around her and draws the slender figure to him until, for the first time, her golden head lies on his shoulder, and his lips press hers in a long and fervent kiss. Then Alys remembers, and with that remembrance of Mildred, shrinks away from him, ashamed and self-condemning. But before another word is spoken there is a sound on the shore—towards which the boat has drifted—that startles them; a sound of footsteps and crackling branches, and from behind a group of weeping willows Miss Harcourt steps out and faces them.

She is not alone; her mother is with her and two brother officers of D'Eyncourt's!

Watching with the vigilance that came with her mortified love and vanity, she has tracked her recreant lover here; and on the pretence of an impromptu picnic to Arundel has enlisted the two men, so as to flavour her revenge on her hated rival with more bitterness and humiliation.

"Mildred!" Rex exclaims on the spur of the moment.

"Yes!" she answers, with her eyes blazing and her tones trembling with fury; "it is I. You did not count on witnesses to your charming love scene. Allow me to congratulate you on your sense of honour; and when I tell Captain Trevor and Mr. Molyneux that you and I have been engaged for three months, that our wedding day is fixed, they will recognize what a thorough-paced cad their brother officer is! As for you, Miss Vernon, you are simply a disgrace to your sex, a little *intriguante*, who under the guise of simplicity and innocence is worse than——"

"Stop!" thunders Rex; but the next instant he forgets that such a person as Miss Harcourt exists.

Hardly have the insulting words left her mouth than Alys falls forward in the boat. White and unconscious, she leans against him for a moment; then she lifts her head and opens her large blue eyes wide. They are dazed with terror, her pale lips quiver, her little hands clasp together as if in pleading.

Holding her to his breast, Rex springs on shore, and putting her gently down on the turf, he kneels beside her.

"Alys! My love! My darling! Speak to me for God's sake," he cries wildly, showering down passionate kisses on the little white face, to which the sunbeams lend greater whiteness.

But Cecil Trevor, who has approached the two, and is looking down at them with sympathetic eyes, stoops and touches him on the shoulder.

"Rex," he says in an awed voice, "don't you see how it is? She will never tell you again that she loves you!"

Rex stares up at him bewildered; then he bends once more over his little love. No word comes to his lips, but in his eyes is the horror of realization.

How sweet the small flower-like face looks, lying on its grassy pillow under the amber beams, with a soft wind sighing a requiem over her.

And the woman whose cruel words have wrought this grievous thing, goes quickly away in silence, abashed by the presence of—  
*Death!*

Alys sleeps now. Forget-me-nots as blue as her own eyes are growing over her; and Rex D'Eyncourt has gone back to his old life, and wears a brave front before the world. But a shadow—the shadow of a grave—rests on his face, his mouth has forgotten its careless smile, and he knows that if he lives to be ever so old he will *never* forget the little girl who crept into his heart.

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## FROM SOFIA TO CONSTANTINOPLE.

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“Hotel Royal,  
“Constantinople, May 12th, 18—.

“MY DEAR C—,

“As you stipulated that my letter should not be hurried, saying that you would rather wait for a lengthy gossip than be dismissed with a few lines, scribbled to catch the post, I have put off writing till I should find a leisure hour.

“So you want to know all that I have seen and heard, thought and felt, on this my first journey to the East?

“I am to jot down my reflections just as they come; now I am to give you a fact, now—if I possibly can—a date, and now a description. I am to be as irrelevant and discursive as I choose, and above all, I am not to re-read my epistle when finished, in case it should find its way into the scrap-basket.

“These, I think, were your orders, and though many lands stretch between us, I am as obedient now as I was when we walked on English soil beneath the blossoming chestnuts, little more than a year ago.

“Before we tread the narrow streets of Stamboul, or breathe the fresh air of the Bosphorus, I shall ask you to travel with me through Bulgaria; and if I linger on the way, it will be because I know that you will not find the most homely scene, the most trivial incident, tedious, so long as it serves to give the local colouring of a country whose political history is not less interesting than that of your beloved Greek Republics.

“I have come from a people in its infancy to an empire in its old age; the one vigorous, active and impatient, making its traditions, and looking only to the future; the other fettered by tradition, solely intent upon guarding its fair inheritance, and looking only to the past.

“Your wish to be here cannot exceed mine to have you; would, indeed, that you could have left your London life, with its busy monotony, and that together we might have observed and studied, have discussed, possibly have disagreed, just sufficiently to give food for argument. After all, perhaps your lot is the more comfortable; the East can show many wonders, but Western civilization is not without attractions. This I felt keenly during our night's sojourn at Saremburg, a village on the borders of Eastern Roumelia, when we halted after a journey of seven hours from Sofia.

"Our lodging consisted of a small room of dubious cleanliness which opened directly on to the railway. An official brought me a heap of blankets, for the night was fresh, and two watch dogs, who liked the vicinity of the luncheon-basket, assisted at my evening toilet. The air of this never-to-be-forgotten apartment was close and unsavoury, though the wind could find easy access to it, and the beds—but no, they are better imagined than described. Suffice it to say, that sleep was not to be found upon their hard mattresses, and that sundry nightly visitants kept me restlessly awake till morning.

"Yes, 'delightful' though it is to travel in Bulgaria, there are times when one feels that an English bed, in an English house in a London street, possesses considerable advantages.

"Our fellow-travellers, a gregarious but distinguished military and diplomatic party, wisely made no attempt to sleep; but, congregating in a 'Have' at some distance from our modest tenement, they passed their time in singing national ballads and in discussing the topics of the day.

"We came through very fine country on our first day's journey, and accustomed as we are to the barren site of Sofia, and the meagre beauty of its surrounding villages, we greatly appreciated the change. Luxuriant vegetation is everywhere to be seen, once away from the plain which to many hurried travellers has belied the real beauty of the country, and between Vaharel and Saremburg the scenery becomes magnificent.

"To the right of the Ichtiman Pass rises the dark range of the Rhodope, their sides flecked with snow and their peaks completely hidden in clouds. Their broken outline, the rich and fertile country at their base, and the swiftly-flowing Maritza (which takes its source in the mountain of Rulla) make a picture full of grandeur and of colour.

"The Maritza gives its name to the Bulgarian National Anthem and is the most spirited and melodious of any of the national airs I have heard—this, however, is not saying much, as those songs for the most part resemble wails, and are utterly unmelodious.

"From Ichtiman the line turns southward; it leaves the Balkans on its left and runs for some distance beneath the Rhodope before it emerges into the plains of Philippopolis. Although we had stopped at Saremburg for the night we were not more than two hours from the capital, a provokingly short journey after our bad accommodation; but such are the penalties of travelling by a new line.

"The plain is rich and wooded; the dense corn fields stretch for miles, and in this first week of May were already a rich green. The soil is so rich that manure is not needed, and before sowing the peasant merely scrapes it a few inches deep with the most primitive of ploughs.

"I thought of the tillers of arid land at home, and wished that

I could transport them to this virgin soil, to this young country full of wealth and promise.

"Why not?"

"Because the exclusive and suspicious character of the people would, in all probability, render the life of foreign immigrants impossible. They are jealous of foreign interference, even when they themselves might profit by it. I believe that a Frenchman tried to establish a wine manufactory in the vineyards near Varna, but so many obstacles were thrown in his way by the peasants and local authorities that he was obliged to relinquish the scheme. Had he been allowed to continue he would in all probability have opened a new branch of commerce in the country, for the wine, even as it is now manufactured, is good and it might be made fit for exportation.

"At present the Bulgarian peasant has no sense of or desire for luxuries. We are told by a competent Bulgarian authority that a whole family can live comfortably on 10 francs a week! Good mutton can be bought for 3d. a pound, and the largest loaf of black bread costs 10 centimes. The taxes are not heavy and within the last few years the exaction of payment has not been strict. There are no large landowners, five hundred acres being about the limit a man may possess.

"On nearing Philippopolis we found that rice fields took the place of corn fields, and lie within a mile or so from the town. The city is built on the hill of rock which rises straight out of the plain and resembles the result of a volcanic shock rather than a natural formation.

"There are three hills which look as though torn from the rest of the range.

"On one of them Philippopolis is situated, crowning the summit with its towers. 'At Philippopolis we saw rice in the marshes growing like wheat,' wrote Ghiselin de Beisberg, ambassador of the Austrian Court, when he passed through Philippopolis on his way to Constantinople in the fifteenth century. The city now covers not one but all three of the rocky hills which look as though 'torn' from the mountain range, and spreads widely round this base. The effect of this curiously-built town is eminently picturesque. The houses, each possessing a patch of garden, rise terrace-like one above the other, and these buildings, domes, and minarets appear to be crowded together on steep green banks, with rugged walls of rock interspersed.

"I wish we could have stopped longer in a town of such unique characteristics and boasting so many historical associations.

"If you read Mr. Samuelson's '*Bulgaria Past and Present*,' you will learn more about Philippopolis than I am able to tell you. The three buildings he recommends travellers to visit I was only able to contemplate from the outside—the Boys' Gymnasium,

founded by Prince Alexander; the Girls' Lycée, and the Church of St. Alexander.

"I was much surprised at the number of churches and of schools, and at the advance of civilization in a town which outwardly has not a single modern innovation. There is a large Catholic church and also two Protestant chapels, besides the mosques and Greek cathedrals.

"The oldest part of the town is Turkish, and there are no ruins either of the Roman or Byzantine cities, though remains in the shape of coins, vases, &c., have been exhumed. The tradition is that Philippopolis was called after Philip of Macedon, by whom it was founded on the same site that it now occupies—but this is probably only tradition; it is positively known that Philippopolis was a city of importance in the fourth century A.D.

"On the day of our arrival we walked through the town to the highest peak of the three hills upon which it is situated, and a most curious and picturesque walk that was. At every turn and corner of the quaint narrow streets a painter of *genre* would have found ample material for many a day's work.

"Here is ground that has not been 'used up,' and I wonder no travelling artist has yet found his way thither. The capital is unfortunately the first place visited by strangers to Bulgaria, and I must admit that it offers few attractions to any one of artistic temperament. I had seen no other Bulgarian town, and I was altogether agreeably surprised with Philippopolis; it has a brighter, more homely, more *gemüthlich* appearance than Sofia.

"The walled-in Turkish gardens, glimpses of which are visible through the half-open wooden doors leading into the street, are unknown in Sofia. The streets are steep and narrow and the houses high; it would be possible to shake hands across them from window to window. The favourite colours for outside decoration are blue, yellow, and strawberry red; the designs are elaborate and ornate. Most of the houses have fragile-looking painted balconies, and the casement windows are carefully curtained with white. From these windows women seem to be perpetually gazing, while others crowd the doorsteps, sitting with their arms clasping their knees. The open door behind them shows the garden, the tank of water, and the wooden verandah where brightly-coloured garments are hung out to dry. Such colours as these peasants wear!—reds, blues, greens, orange, impossible to find in Europe; they look as though the loom had interwoven a ray of Eastern sunlight with wool and silk.

"The majority of women are pretty, or at least, if not actually pretty, their dress makes them effective. Henna, which turns their hair to a rich gold, is the favourite dye in use, and the poorest peasant understands the secrets of paint and cosmetics. This applies equally to the female population of Sofia and to that of Philippopolis, but the former are square in form and harsh in

features, and their skins are so dark as to be almost black, whereas the latter are well made, have clear complexions, and very fine eyes. I think in the East, as in the countries of the South, the women have dark, expressive eyes, but the face is spoilt by the coarse ill-shaped mouths. I remember stopping to look back upon a girl as we climbed the unwholesome-smelling street; she was sitting with her head thrown back against the wall, and her firmly moulded arms clasped the baby on her knee. Her blue-black eyes, hair of a rich gold, classic forehead, and full red lips made a picture which seemed worthy rather of Italy than of Bulgaria.

"The inhabitants of Philippopolis look happier, are less morose and *savage* in expression, and have more courteous manners than are to be found among the sullen Schop tribe.

"Our climb over rough flagging stones and through these curious but far from cleanly streets, was well rewarded. Emerging suddenly from a dark by-way we came upon a heap of ruins on the summit of the hill, and standing among them we completely overlooked the houses and gardens beneath. Clouds were gathering and reflected themselves in the marshy plain of rice fields, while the still hot sun streamed on the red roofs and buildings of the city.

"The rain came on suddenly; we took refuge in a Greek cottage which stood a few paces back from the ruin, and while we waited a fine looking Greek led up his horse to bring water. Two leathern pouches were strapped on to the animal's back, a leather conduit was loosened and let down into the well, which occupied a large space in the outer room of the cottage. The man was a water-carrier, a regular profession in Philippopolis, where every glass of water has to be brought from the river, and is paid for at the doors of the houses. I thought of the fountains of pure water which are to be found at every street corner in Sofia, and repented of my wish to make a lengthened stay in a town where the morning tub is an expensive luxury.

"On our way back we visited an American minister who had kindly followed us up the hill when the storm began, bringing umbrellas, and offering us hospitality in his house.

"Here was a new and I thought incongruous element—American sectarianism trying to gain proselytes in the midst of this Bulgar, Greek, Levantine population. I was told however, that the pastor has a congregation of upwards of two thousand, and that Protestantism finds considerable favour among the Bulgarians. His old Turkish house transmogrified into an English home, the shelves of the oak-wainscoted sitting room filled with familiar English books, gave me a feeling of sympathy with this solitary worker, in a way that nothing else could have done.

"We listened to his views about an evening club for street politicians, about self-culture in the form of adorning houses, and we left him with many well wishes on both sides.



"They will soon be having mother's meetings and penny—or rather kreutzer—readings, I thought as we walked away, and I suppressed a sigh for the sameness of the world.

"As we came into an open space from whence half-a-dozen streets emerged, a solitary tree was pointed out to me, famous—with a melancholy fame—for the number of victims who were hanged on its branches during the Turkish war.

"I little thought when I followed the popular indignation caused by the Turkish atrocities—a feeling so adroitly turned to party account—that I should ever live to see the very spot where those deeds were perpetrated, and much alarmed I should then have been at the prospect of visiting a country of which I had no distinct impression except that it was the ground of carnage and bloodshed. The Bulgarians do not appear to cherish any rancour against their former oppressors; they are a practical, unsentimental people, and what they have no reason to fear they do not think it worth while to hate.

"After three days at Philippopolis, I left the city hoping to return; our visit was rendered particularly pleasant by the hospitality of an English lady, in whose comfortable house we were thankful to stay.

"Nothing in Bulgaria has interested me more than the experiences of this lady who has chosen her home in a far-away land of strangers, and is devoting her life to aid in the improvement of this infant nation, and its advance towards civilization.

"There are many very fine expeditions to be made in the neighbourhood of Philippopolis; unfortunately we were not able to undertake any, and I particularly regret not having seen Kesanlik, the famous Balkan valley of the roses. However, we may go there on our way home, and in that case we shall come in time for the rose harvest, which begins in the first week of June.

"We made one long drive into the country, and visited an old Turkish house, which would have delighted you. It was a large, low house, situated on a hill, and commanding a wide view of pastoral land; on one side trees grew up to the windows, and on the other the wooden verandah led on to a walled-in court, from whence the garden was reached by a low door and a narrow flight of steps. Well could one fancy the veiled Turkish women flitting up and down the steps, loitering beside the stream which flows in a channel of stone, or admiring their own images in the basin of water formed by it in the midst of the garden. A gigantic elm tree, certainly the largest tree I have seen, grew on the side of the hill and partially screened from sight the green and wooded valley. What aimless chatter, what silvery laughter must not the old tree have heard? How many coloured mats and dainty coffee cups had been set on the grass beneath it; and of how many perfumed cigarettes have not its leaves inhaled the odour?

"There is a broken bench there now, and the flower beds have

been trodden down, and only the running water is unchanged. I am afraid that in our over-coats and ulsters we but poorly replaced the veiled Turkish ladies in their garments of soft silk, and that our japanned tea-cups were a poor exchange for their painted porcelain. *Sic transit!* The elm tree thought, no doubt, that a modern picnic was less picturesque and pleasant than the ladies of a pacha's harem.

"A truce to these fancies. We drove back in the dark, and the jolts, jerks and see-saw movements of the vehicle quickly dissipated poetical regrets. The carriages of Philippopolis have an even more remarkable capacity than those of Sofia for going through or over any hindrance that presents itself in their across-country route.

"Our journey from Philippopolis to Adrianople—from six a.m. to three p.m.—was uneventful except for the ruthless opening of box and bag on the frontier, a proceeding which is conscientiously carried out by the Turkish officials. The country about Adrianople is green and flat; the houses on the outskirts of the town have an unexpectedly civilized and wealthy appearance, but the town itself, though thoroughly Oriental, is not picturesque. The mosque, built by the Sultan Salem towards the end of the sixteenth century, is a gigantic building, and by many even more admired than St. Sofia.

"The freshness of the colours, the brightness of the mosaic, and the spotless cleanliness with which the whole building is kept, certainly produces a more vivid impression than the time-worn domes and minarets of Stamboul.

"The Salem mosque is the only sight to be visited at Adrianople, and I think a day's sojourn there is quite sufficient to grasp the characteristics of the place. It is noted for having been the country resort of Solymán the Magnificent, who repaired thither 'to enjoy the good hawking and the bracing climate.' Benberg gives a delightful description of the sultan's hawking, which I would copy for you if I had the book by me. I strongly advise you to read those letters of the eminent Austrian ambassador. He writes in a familiar colloquial style, and every page contains curious information.

"I fear that, so far as food and lodging go, he fared less well than we did; our rooms were clean and comfortable and our dinner good, and we left Adrianople the next morning, proposing to take the same lodging on our journey home.

"The weather was fine and fresh when, at six a.m., we started on the last stage of our journey. The little Turkish garden on which our rooms looked out was perfumed by its orange trees and rose trees; the walls were hidden in honeysuckle, and a fountain sparkled in the midst of a bed of trailing mignonette.

"I was astonished at the luxuriance of the growth here. I had not then seen the gardens on the Bosphorus, and it was quite a

new light to me that the Turks were such a flower-loving people.

"At the station we found a wonderful mixture of creeds and nationalities—veiled Turkish women, Greek ladies in Western costumes of dubious taste, Catholic nuns with their school children, a Greek pope, a Turkish 'saint,' and peasants both Bulgarian and Turkish. The fez is universally worn by the natives and is in my opinion the only becoming part of the Turkish dress; the baggy trousers, loose jacket, and sandled feet give a slouching gait and slovenly air to the wearer.

"Many of the men are handsome, and I was particularly struck by their fine, dark eyes; their expression is earnest, even to melancholy, and there is an indefinable gloom in their general demeanour. The rapt, unearthly look on the faces of some cannot fail to arrest the attention of the European travellers. It is as though their religion, which has so powerful a hold upon mind and imagination, was devoid of spiritual happiness, and was for ever pressing upon them a bitter sense of the briefness of this life and the endurance of the life to come.

"And now I think I have given you enough reading for one post, and with my first view of Constantinople begins a new era in my travels.

"I can picture you to myself when you read this letter. You are sitting near that very tidy desk of yours, my lengthy epistle having been extricated from a heart-sinking mass of MS. papers, business letters, &c., after a quarter of an hour's search. A fire is burning on this cold May evening; Bessie has just brought in the tea, and you are lulled by the voices of visitors in the drawing-room above.

"'But stay,' you remonstrate, 'I must have your impressions, your sensations, your wonder on first beholding the queen of cities.

"Well, dear C—, with my first view of Constantinople I must confess that I was disappointed.

"From the train one catches only here and there a view of the Bosphorus, and as one nears the city, the gigantic fortifications, which are partially in ruins, leave only occasional glimpses of the Golden Horn. I shall always regret, disagreeable though I believe the journey from Sofia is, that we did not come by water.

"Yesterday from Therapia we looked across the Bosphorus to the narrow mouth of the Black Sea, and I can imagine the delight of being suddenly transported into those blue straits—those blue straits with their wooded shores, their unsurpassed gardens, their marble palaces, and while the setting sun burns on the water, of gliding up to the Golden Horn where the caique darts swiftly to-and-fro and the ever motionless fleet keeps a melancholy watch over Constantine's city—founded by heroes and sung and loved by poets.

“*‘Lacrimæ sint rerum.’* Tears for the ambitions, the struggles, and the too brief lives of great men; tears for the peoples which ‘tread upon each other’s heels,’ and obliterate each other’s traces; tears for the false religions and misguided efforts of brave men. This is a melancholy place, despite its wealth of beauty—but my pen is running off again; it is getting late, and I must say good-bye.

“As I sit here I can see the blue, the intensely blue waters, the sails of the ships, and a single minaret standing like a column of snow against the azure of the sky; between me and my vision a bough of westeria comes nodding as the breeze moves it, and from the garden of the English Embassy rise the spring odours of moist earth and budding flowers. Good-night, good-bye.”

M.

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## A CRACK COUNTY.

By MRS. EDWARD KENNARD,

AUTHOR OF "KILLED IN THE OPEN," "THE GIRL IN THE BROWN HABIT,"  
"A REAL GOOD THING," ETC., ETC.

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### CHAPTER XXXVIII.

#### JUMPING MUDDYFORD BOTTOM.

FORTUNATELY, unhappy thoughts, like everything else on this earth, are subject to the law of finality. Before long, Bob's meditations were interrupted in an altogether unexpected fashion.

As he turned in at the gate of his own park, the blast of a horn fell upon his ears, waking echoes that had slept silent for many a day; and a few minutes afterwards he found himself overtaken by the whole of the Morbey Anstead Hunt, who chased their fox into his shrubberies, and pursued him hotly, until the hounds became perplexed by the number of fresh animals that sprang up. The rain now came down in torrents, discharged with icy force from a lowering cloud overhead. So fierce was this shower that it caused a halt in the proceedings, and people with one accord began to look about for an available place of shelter.

"Won't you come in? You had much better all come in," cried Bob, addressing friends and foes alike. "It's not a bit of good standing out there and getting wet through. Come in, come in, and welcome."

So hearty was the hospitality offered, and so intensely disagreeable the weather, that a considerable number of people gladly responded to his invitation. One set the example to the other, and very soon there was quite a crowd of men and women inside the spacious hall of Straightem Court, tossing off Bob's brown sherry with evident relish, and nibbling daintily at sandwich or biscuit. The servants had not had such a bustling up for many a year, and were amazed at so heterogeneous an influx of visitors, the majority of whom their late master would not have condescended to talk to, much less ask beneath his roof. "Quantity, but not quality," sneered the pompous butler to his satellite, as he passed him bearing a loaded tray of empty glasses. As for Bob, it cheered him to see human faces around. It was far better than coming home and finding the place empty, and having

nothing to do but sit down and think over the events of the morning. He tried to drive away thought by moving about among his guests and personally attending to their wants, and he won the hearts of all the farmers present by ringing the bell and ordering up some very choice old port for their especial benefit, and wishing good luck to agriculture. But he looked in vain for Lord Littelbrane. His lordship was as obstinately stand-off as on the never-to-be-forgotten occasion of Stiffton Flat races. Neither could he discern General Prosieboy, which caused him some slight wonderment, for he had made a pretty correct estimate of that gentleman's character.

However, he would probably have felt consoled for his absence had he been aware of the fact that the gallant old warrior was at that very moment imbibing a glass of stiff whisky and water in a covered yard at his (Bob's) expense, and exchanging witticisms with the under-housemaid.

Ladies are proverbially brave, and Lady DeFochsey, not calculating on quite such a day, had gone out hunting with the rest. Stiffshire was a county that offered but few resources for the stay-at-homes. Those who did not follow the chase led lives of absolute stagnation; and a frost was terrible, for all the idle young men went posting off to London immediately, and there were none but old fogies left to talk-to.

Now her ladyship's smart scarlet jacket, with its white facings, light waistcoat and etceteras, had cost the best part of sixteen guineas; as a consequence she entertained a great regard and veneration for it. Having sallied forth without a covert coat, she was in considerable trepidation at the thought of the beautiful, extra-fine cloth stretching, and the entire garment thus becoming too large. It fitted without a wrinkle at present, but what might be the result if once it got wet through? This was the first season she had ventured to appear in "pink," and so far she had been fortunate enough to escape any drenching rain. The scarlet came out as fresh and bright as ever, and filled her every time she wore it with an impression of her own good looks, which to a naturally pretty woman was eminently agreeable and gratifying in the extreme.

But to-day the weather threatened to rob this much-prized garment of all its brilliancy. After her last somewhat unfriendly parting with Mr. Jarrett, she had resolved in a fit of petulance to have nothing more to say to him. There was a point when running after men became a nuisance, and did not repay the inevitable trouble. If, in spite of all his aptitudes, Bob refused to act the part of "kindred spirit," why, then she must look about her and find one elsewhere. It was a vulgar saying, but a true, that there were "as many fish in the sea as ever came out of it."

It was quite possible to establish psychological relations with some individual more responsive, and altogether endowed with

finer sensibilities. Mr. Jarrett was good-looking, but horribly matter-of-fact. He looked at things from quite a vulgar and material point of view.

In spite of such reflections, when her ladyship saw several of her friends and acquaintances march boldly into Straightem Court, after first leaving their horses in the spacious stables, she put her pride in her pocket, and followed suit. The scarlet jacket was more important at this juncture than dignity; already there were great, dark splashes upon it, and she could almost fancy that the waist had begun to expand.

So she jumped hastily to the ground, threw her reins to the nearest groom, and entered the house without more ado. Her theory was, that woman should always be chameleon-like in nature, since in the first place circumstances forced her to be adaptive; and in the second, it gave her such an enormous advantage, when she could present many fronts to her natural enemy—man. Nothing disconcerted him so much as blowing hot and cold by turns.

When Bob saw who the new arrival was, a smile spread over his features.

"Lady DeFochsey!" he exclaimed in tones of unmistakable gratification, "this is indeed kind. I thought you had made up your mind, after our last meeting, to join the majority, and cut me dead."

She looked a little embarrassed at this speech, but turned it off with a laugh.

"You were a very foolish, headstrong boy, but I dare say you have grown wiser by this time, and at any rate, I intend to give you another chance," with a pretty arch smile.

"I'm delighted to hear it. I could not bear to think we had quarrelled."

"It was your own fault," she said, sipping at a glass of sherry which Bob had just handed her. "But as a proof of my magnanimity I give you your choice. What is it to be, war or peace? Decide either way you like." And she made a little coquettish grimace, quite thrown away upon the person whom it was intended to captivate.

"Oh! peace, peace," he murmured hurriedly; "I am far too miserable at the present moment to care to be at loggerheads with any one."

She raised her eyebrows in astonishment, and looked at him keenly and critically. As she did so, she was struck all at once by the altered expression of his countenance, which made it appear almost ten years older. His despondency and dejection were so great that he did not even seek to conceal them, as most certainly he would have striven to do later on. A deep soul-weariness prevents good acting.

"Why, Bob," she ejaculated, falling back into the familiar style



of nomenclature first adopted, "what on earth's the matter with you? You look all to pieces."

"I look what I am, then."

"But what's wrong? What are you miserable about?"

"No—no—nothing," he stammered in return; "at least, nothing that I care to talk of."

"Is it money?"

"No."

"Business?"

"No."

"Family worries?"

"No."

"Then it's love as a matter of course. It can't possibly be anything else."

He tossed off a glass of wine, but made no reply. She, however, needed none.

"I suppose the 'beautiful being' whom I chaffed you about the other day is at the bottom of this tremendously tragical affair, eh?" she resumed insistently. "Has the young person not been kind?"

Bob still maintained an obstinate silence. It was torture to have his freshly-inflicted wound so mercilessly probed by a cruel female hand. He writhed like a captured bird caught in a net.

"Come, it's not very civil of you to decline to answer a question made by a lady. How is she?"

"How is who?" he asked irritably, goaded into speech at last.

"Why! your little friend in the patched habit—the doctor's daughter; or if you want it put clearer, the girl you were carrying on with so outrageously."

The blood flew to his brow. Indignation made every muscle quiver.

"I presume you mean Miss Lankester! and as for carrying on, as you call it, I'm not carrying on at all."

"Oh! aren't you? Since when have you come to your senses, pray?"

"Since half-past ten o'clock this morning, if you must know the precise hour."

"Well, I'm glad you've escaped from that exceedingly forward and immodest young woman. And all I can say is, that the way she ran after you out hunting was really quite disgusting."

"She didn't do anything of the sort," he retorted angrily. "And please don't slander her."

"I'm not slandering her; nasty, sly little thing, though I'm sure she deserves it."

"Yes, you are, and if you want to hear the truth of the matter, I'll tell it you, rather than stand by and hear Miss Lankester abused."

"Well?" said her ladyship interrogatively, making no attempt to conceal her curiosity.

"Miss Lankester, instead of behaving in the manner you assert, happens to be already engaged, and won't have a word to say to me. There!" And Bob clenched his teeth in anguish.

She shrugged her shoulders with a truly provoking gesture of incredulity. That a person in the exceedingly humble position of a country doctor's daughter, should stick to any pre-formed engagement, when she had the chance of securing Mr. Jarrett, of Straightem Court, surpassed her comprehension altogether. Her mind could not realize the possibility of so tremendous an act of folly.

"Pshaw! What's the good of telling me such nonsense as that. I really wonder where you expect to go to."

But again he relapsed into silence. Her lively sallies could not succeed in rousing him from the dejection in which he was steeped. This fact dawned upon her by degrees. She began to be aware that something was very seriously wrong with him. Now that there was no longer any question of rivalry she could afford to be generous and sympathetic. Besides, men were often caught on the rebound. If he had not been so good-looking, she would not have troubled herself about him one bit, but as it was, she could not help feeling interested in his sorrows—imaginary or otherwise.

"Bob," she said with increasing kindliness. "Am I to understand that you have proposed to this little insignificant girl, and that she has actually refused you?"

He turned sharply away. Her eyes seemed to sear him like scorching flame. Why could she not leave him alone? What was it to her, whether he had asked Dot Lankester to be his wife or not?

"Lady De Fochsey," he said with a petulant gesture, "you are of course at liberty to draw any conclusions you choose from our conversation. I can only say that the subject is a painful one, and I would feel obliged by your not discussing it. I—I"—breaking down suddenly—"am very unhappy."

She might be foolish, but apart from her vanities and coquetry, she was by no means a bad-hearted woman. Moreover, she felt that she had pressed him a trifle ungenerously. His utter despondency caused her to experience a sensation of genuine emotion, such as she had not felt for a long time.

How nice it must be to be loved like this. How happy it would make her to inspire so real a passion.

There was something artless and engaging about him; simple perhaps, yet withal different from other men of her acquaintance. His youth, too, appealed to her. Ever since she had turned five-and-twenty she had developed a strong partiality

for boys. Candour and innocence were refreshing from their very rarity.

"Look here, Bob," she said, "you and I may have had our little differences, but I'm not one to bear malice, and if you feel low-spirited, and in want of sympathy and consolation, why then," giving his hand a gentle pressure, "you know where to come."

A lump rose up in his throat. He was much too wretched to care to avail himself of the invitation, but he felt that it was kindly meant. And a little kindness goes such a long way when one is in trouble. In a curiously husky voice he said, "Thank you," and then hurried away to the nearest window, where he stood for several seconds resolutely forcing back a certain moisture that dimmed his eyesight. Lady De Fochsey had never been so near converting him into a medium capable of receiving and transfusing electric force, but her success was due to human sympathy and not to spiritualistic agencies. A break in the sky, a gleam of sickly light, and an abatement in the rain now caused those within doors to hurry out in search of their horses.

Directly his guests showed symptoms of departing, Bob went upstairs and hastily donned hunting attire. He might as well go out as stay at home; moreover, he felt in a mood when, to ride recklessly at a certain number of big fences, and to gallop at full speed across the green pastures would act as a sedative and bring relief to his overwrought nerves.

He had previously ordered Kingfisher to be got ready. He had never yet been on his back, having, up till to-day, religiously reserved his best horse for Dot; but now—and a wave of bitterness flooded his spirit—what was the use of any longer keeping him for that purpose? After what had passed, he felt nothing would ever induce her to ride him again, and place herself under an obligation. He remembered her original reluctance, which of course would henceforth be intensified.

Oh! how sad it was, to find all one's dreamings, dreams and not realities, to see the airy structure of hope and love, so skillfully constructed in the chambers of one's mind, crumble away at the first unexpected stroke. What a blankness and dreariness remained behind when all the picturings of the imagination proved vain and could never be attained. How brightness turned to darkness, pleasure to pain, and youth to premature old age. Life was very, very cruel; despair its key-note. So he mused as he mounted his horse.

A minute or two later Burnett sallied forth from the wash-house, where he had taken refuge, and calling to his hounds to follow him, trotted out on to the lawn, where he was soon joined by the entire field. By this time there was not much chance of hitting off the line of the hunted fox, so it was resolved to draw sundry plantations within the precincts of the park. A small

spinney was first called upon, which immediately furnished a fine, white-tagged old fellow. Judging from his behaviour he appeared to be a stranger, for, unlike the home-bred article, he showed no disposition to linger, but at once set his mask straight for the open.

Owing to the recent frost, the weather, and various causes, the Field was a much smaller one than usual, and all those who meant "going" could do so to-day, and had no excuse for lagging behind. Even the starting rush for the nearest available gate was comparatively mild, and no one got blocked for more than a few seconds. Consequently, everybody possessing the inclination secured a good start. A chorus of melodious music filled the air. From deep-throated followers burst the familiar sound which cheers the heart of every thorough sportsman. Hounds dashed out of the spinney and flashed across the greensward like a silver comet.

What mattered then the wind and the rain, when two-and-twenty couple were racing ahead, throwing their tongues joyously and flinging after their quarry with glorious dash and resolution? Who cared then if the sky were grey or blue, the atmosphere dry or moist, the wind chilly or the reverse? Every mind, human as well as canine, was concentrated on the chase. A look of determination stole over men's features. They set their jaws, tightened their reins, settled themselves in their saddles, and prepared to ride hard in defiance of cold and wet. In another minute they were out of the park and into the fields beyond. Here the fun began, for Reynard was evidently determined on putting roadsters to confusion, and chose a bee line across country.

Big, the fences round Straightem village were always, but to-day they seemed even bigger than usual, or else this crafty pug had a better notion of baulking the enemy. Without hesitation he led his foes straight down to a yawning bottom, with a thick-set fence on the near side, and a positively ghastly gully on the off. The line of pursuit was checked. A more awkward obstacle could not well be imagined. In the annals of the Hunt it was recorded that no man had ever cleared Muddyford Bottom at this particular spot.

With muttered execrations, the leading horsemen—Burnett amongst the rest—pulled up and looked round for a place where, with a crawl, a splash and a lucky scramble, they could get in and out.

Bob had two advantages over his companions. He was a stranger and did not know the country, and he was reckless—at all events on this particular day. To break his neck out hunting seemed to him just then the highest good that was left to him in life. He courted death, though death, like a shy maiden, is apt to refuse too ardent a wooer. The bigger the

obstacle, the more eagerly did Bob welcome it. It did not matter what evil befell him, now that Dot had given him his *cong  *. Of any effect he was likely to produce he did not think for an instant. He was much too miserable to care any longer for other people's opinions.

His face was drawn, his eyes wild and bloodshot. Those who noticed his appearance whispered that he had been drinking heavily, but this was a libel. He might not be over sane, but at all events liquor had nothing to do with his insanity. It was unrequited passion that rendered him oblivious to personal danger, and lent him a courage bordering on madness.

Anyhow, whilst his neighbours were coasting up and down the Bottom, and hounds were rapidly disappearing from vision, though their keen notes came floating backward to the ear—for the ladies were garrulous to-day—he took Kingfisher sharply by the head, turned him round, and rushed him at the formidable gulf.

The good horse was only just out of his stable, and as fresh as paint. He needed no second invitation, especially with the pack stealing away in front of him. Besides, it required an exceptionally awkward place to stop him. Other horses might find Stiffshire tax their powers, but it was not often that he failed to prove equal to the occasion. But best of all, his heart was in the right place.

He made a magnificent bound, and did not attempt to refuse. Only when he saw what an abyss confronted him on the landing side, he jerked his hind-quarters round with a desperate effort. Even then he dropped both hind legs, and threw Bob right on to his neck. For a second it was touch and go whether he would fall or not, but he was as active as a cat, and making a gallant struggle, recovered himself, and was up and away in less time than it takes to tell of.

For once, Muddyford Bottom had been fairly jumped. It measured four and twenty feet across, and so much was it dreaded that not another soul ventured to follow Bob's example. He was alone with hounds, and gained an advantage which throughout the run none succeeded in wresting from him.

The Mutual Adorationites gnashed their teeth with impotent rage. They could not produce a Nimrod to compete with the much abused and despised "outsider," whom, without even knowing, they had seen fit to condemn. Not one of their number could touch him. He showed his back to the whole crew, lords, generals and captains, and in some quarters there was glee, in others, tribulation.

Meantime, Bob pursued his victorious career. His blood was literally on fire. A wild, hot glow pervaded his entire frame. He was scarcely conscious of his own actions. It still seemed to him as if he were trying to battle his way out of some dark nightmare which oppressed his spirit with a maddening intensity. He kept

his eye vacantly fixed on the leading hounds, and took little or no heed of the intervening fences. Kingfisher was left to negotiate them as he pleased, and perhaps for that reason jumped all the more perfectly, for he dearly liked having his head and not being interfered with.

And now it came on to pour again mercilessly. In five minutes the rain had penetrated through every portion of Bob's coat. But he never even noticed it. He was impervious to outside considerations. The chaos of his brain refused external detail. Even excitement could not altogether chase away despair, though it lightened it for the time being.

Had he been riding any other horse but Kingfisher, he must have "come to grief" a dozen times over. As it was, his escapes were marvellous. Oxers, bullfinches, break-neck timber, nothing could stop him. Where the hounds went there went he, himself and steed seeming to possess supernatural powers.

That run is famous to this day in the chronicles of the Morbey Anstead Hunt. *The Field* and the *County Gentleman* wrote such glowing paragraphs about it, that it is needless to describe it minutely. Even those who most felt their defeat admitted that one man had the best of it throughout, and that this fortunate and much-to-be-envied individual was Robert Jarrett, Esq., of Straightem Court.

When, after fifty-five panting minutes, Bob pulled up his foaming horse, and held the dead fox aloft, amid a circle of clamouring hounds, whilst he waited for Burnett to make his appearance, he little dreamt of the glory he had gained, or the reputation won. Nevertheless, during those few sweet moments, he *almost* enjoyed himself and forgot Dot. But not for long.

When the fun was over and the excitement at an end, then the internal force evaporated which had hitherto sustained him. A sick, weary, deadening feeling stole over his frame. He had but the one horse out who had earned undying fame, but the gallant animal was done to a turn, which was not to be wondered at, seeing that having received no orders to the contrary, Matthews had watered and fed him as usual. And now Bob patted Kingfisher mechanically on the neck, and turned his head towards home.

Hunting was a first-rate sport. No one relished it more than he did—but, after all, hunting was not Dot, and without Dot life had lost its flavour.

Eleven miles as the crow flies had that good, stout-hearted fox taken him from Straightem Court. It was quite dark when he reached home. The short December day had closed in, and the rain still descended with steady persistency.

He felt it now, for the warmth which had animated his blood while the run lasted had slowly given place to a deadly chill.

He shivered as he rode under the dark trees of the avenue, and

heard drop after drop roll to the ground. When he got into the stable yard, he was so stiff and so numbed that Matthews had to help him to dismount. His hands and feet had lost all sensation.

"Take a warm bath, sir, take a warm bath, and 'ave a drop of something hot to drink," counselled the old groom, as his master stood and trembled. "It's been a mortal cold day, and you've got a regular chill on you."

But Bob, instead of listening to good advice, insisted on loitering about, until he had ascertained that Kingfisher was none the worse for his exertions.

"I should think myself a very poor sort of sportsman, Matthews," he said, "if I looked after No. One before looking after my horse."

Matthews smiled approvingly. The more he saw of Bob the better he liked him.

"There's a many gentlemen," he said, "in this country who rides well, but there be mighty few who considers their 'osses afore themselves. Times 'as haltered since I was a boy. But now go and get changed, do-ee. What am I here for, except to see after the nags?" Upon which, Bob entered the house.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### A PARTING REQUEST.

THE next day Bob was seriously ill; so ill that he was obliged to send for Doctor Lankester to come and see him in his professional capacity. He had had no rest all night, a sharp pain in his side, accompanied by an unusual difficulty in breathing, having quite prevented his getting any sleep. During the long hours of darkness he jumped the Muddyford Bottom a hundred times in imagination, whilst every formidable fence cleared during that never-to-be-forgotten run appeared photographed upon his brain with the distinctness of a miniature.

Doctor Lankester found him sitting cowering over a blazing fire in the smoking-room.

His eyes were bright, his cheeks unnaturally flushed, his skin dry and parched; yet, in spite of these and other feverish symptoms, he complained of an intense feeling of chilliness.

"You say you have a pain in your left side?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, dreadful. It's just like a knife running through one."

"H'm! And you experience difficulty in breathing?"

"I do. Once or twice during the night I thought I should have been suffocated."

"Are you hot and cold by turns, or do you feel cold all the time?"



"Now you mention it, I get awfully warm every now and then."

"Ah! I thought so. You will have to be careful, my dear boy, and do exactly as I tell you."

Although Dr. Lankester was far too experienced in his profession to alarm a patient needlessly, his grave countenance showed that he did not at all like Bob's appearance. Acting with medical authority, he ordered him back to bed at once, recommending warmth and quiet. He saw these orders obeyed, and remained some little time giving instructions to Charles, who was appointed to wait upon the invalid.

"What a fuss about nothing!" exclaimed Bob, trying to speak cheerily. But though he professed a great disdain of coddling, he was glad to be forced to lie still, since he realized that he was considerably worse than he chose to admit. Doctor Lankester gave him no choice, but put him on the sick list there and then, and in his heart of hearts he thankfully submitted.

After a while the doctor took his leave, saying he would send round some suitable medicine and look in again later on.

He was as good as his word, for towards evening he once more visited Straightem Court, and stayed there over an hour, personally seeing that all his directions had been carried out. This having been done, he was distressed to find Bob worse instead of better, and the suspicions which he had entertained earlier in the day now received the fullest confirmation. He no longer doubted what his friend's malady was, and therefore took it upon himself to give the necessary orders.

Entirely on his own responsibility he telegraphed to a well-known London institution for a trained nurse to be sent down the first thing next morning. He knew now that the young man's illness was no passing indisposition, but likely to prove a serious affair, requiring the greatest care and attention. Bob's lonely position filled him with compassion, and he was determined, individually, to do all he could for him.

When he reached home he said as much to his daughter. Mrs. Lankester had gone to dine with a relation, and was not expected back till the evening.

"I'm afraid our friend Jarrett is in a bad way," he concluded, after giving Dot a detailed account of his patient's condition. "I don't like the look of things at all. He doesn't know it, but he has got a weak chest naturally, and our English climate has played the bear with him."

"Oh! papa," cried the girl, alarmed by the gravity of her father's manner, "remember how good he has been to us. Don't let us leave the poor young man alone in that great, dreary house. Can't we have him here and nurse him?"

"He is scarcely in a fit state to be moved at present. Besides, your mother is not a good one with illness in the house. It fidgets her and puts her out."

"True, but I can't bear to think of his having no one but servants to look after him."

Her father smiled approval. She had inherited his own warm heart.

"You don't consider me of much good, that's quite clear, Dot. Will you feel satisfied when I tell you that it is my intention to sit up with Mr. Jarrett to-night?"

"You! Oh! papa, that is kind of you. But is he very bad, then?"

"I'm afraid so. He is in for an attack of pleurisy, which threatens at any moment to assume a dangerous nature. It seems he went out hunting yesterday and got wet to the skin."

"But he was here," she cried impulsively. "He did not leave me till eleven o'clock."

"I don't know how that may be, but the lad told me himself he had gone with the hounds and caught a regular chill. Dot," with a kindly look stealing over his face, "we must pull him through if we can."

"Oh! yes, yes; of course we must. Only it all seems so sudden, and I can't realize that he is ill. But you will want a nurse. Why should not I be his nurse?"

"I have already telegraphed for one."

"May not I help? I should like to if I might." And she looked up with a pair of pleading eyes.

"You shall later on, Dot; but just now I want you to stay at home and tell your mother when she comes back where I am spending the night, so that she need not be under any alarm."

Two or three days passed away, and in spite of every care and all conceivable remedies, the patient showed no signs of improvement. In vain did Doctor Lankester prescribe opium and calomel and apply mustard poultices; they proved powerless to subdue the disease. Another doctor was called in, but he entirely approved of the treatment already adopted, and beyond one or two trifling suggestions had no advice to offer. Meantime Doctor Lankester was beginning to entertain grave fears for the result, and redoubled his attentions. What puzzled and distressed him most was the feeble vitality possessed by this apparently strong, healthy young man; Bob seemed to have so little recuperative power, and so small a share of that physical clinging to life which is characteristic of nine human beings out of ten. He could not help thinking that something lay heavy on his mind.

Before long Bob became delirious, and then the good doctor guessed at the cause. He was deeply touched when he learnt how great was the invalid's affection for his daughter. He would have welcomed him as a son-in-law for his own sake, quite apart from any worldly considerations, having contracted a great liking for the young man. Now he could only show his good will by devoting all his spare hours to him.

At the end of an anxious week, Dr. Lankester almost gave up hopes of Bob's recovery. True, the fever and pain had left him, but he seemed frightfully weak, and totally unable to rally. Unless some change speedily took place, he foresaw that death from exhaustion was imminent.

On the morning of the eighth day, as he was sitting in the sick room, he was startled by seeing Bob's eyes fixed earnestly upon him, with an expression of fully restored consciousness, which boded well.

"Doctor," he said feebly, "tell me the truth; I can bear it. Am—am I going to die?" and his eyes looked larger and solemn than ever.

Doctor Lankester made a vain effort to speak, but a lump rose up in his throat, and when he tried to give a consolatory answer, his voice failed him.

"You need not trouble to tell me what I want to know," continued Bob, after a slight pause, during which he had narrowly watched his companion's countenance. "After all, it was a foolish question."

"There—there may be a chance yet," faltered the doctor in return. "You seem better to-day."

"Do I? I'm sorry for that. The truth is, I don't care to go on living."

"But, my poor, dear friend, you are so young to think of death as a refuge from trouble."

"That may be. But some young people feel as old as the hills, and long for rest, and I am one of them. Can't you—can't you understand?"

"Yes," huskily, "I think so. I wish it might all have been different."

"Thank you, doctor. Thank you for saying those words. I always felt that I had a friend in you. But don't be angry with—with Dot," turning red as he pronounced the girl's name. "It was not her fault."

"No, I suppose not. These things can't be helped."

"And you see, if—if she had grown to care for me, she would have been sorry now, and as it is"—with a wan smile—"nobody is much the worse. Dick will step into my shoes when I am gone, and the only person who will really feel my loss deeply will be my mother. Poor, dear old mum! I wish I could have seen her again just to tell her not to mind."

"Hush! Bob, don't talk like that. You may pull through yet," cried Dr. Lankester. "My belief is you could if you would. It's your infernal indifference to life that keeps you back in my opinion. If only you had something to look forward to you would pick up in no time."

"I believe I should," answered the patient with quiet conviction. "But that's not likely."

Doctor Lankester's mouth was twitching. His eyes were full of tears. He could no longer hide his emotion, and rose as if to leave.

"Are you going?" said Bob. "If so, I wish you would do me a favour."

"Of course I will. What is it?"

"I want you, please, to send to Stiffton for a solicitor, and tell him to drive over here at once."

"Yes, Bob. Anything more?"

The colour flamed up into the young man's cheeks.

"Doctor," he said hesitatingly, "do you—do you think Dot would come and see me? I should so like to speak to her once more."

"She shall come, but on one condition. You must not excite or tire yourself."

Whereupon Doctor Lankester hurried out of the room, too much overcome to continue the conversation. Any sudden emotion might prove fatal to the patient in his present condition; on the other hand if Dot could inspire in him a wish to live, he was of opinion that Bob might still be saved. Yet, how was he to induce his daughter to transfer her affections from one man to the other? The task seemed beyond his power, even were it right to attempt it. The issue must lie with God. Bob was closeted for a whole hour with the lawyer, and when Doctor Lankester re-entered the sick room, he was surprised to find him considerably stronger and more cheerful. Strange to say, the exertion appeared to have done him good, and his mind was evidently easier than it had been for some time past.

"Now, please, fetch Dot," he called out impatiently, directly his medical adviser approached.

"Have you not done enough for to-day?" rejoined that gentleman. "Don't you think it will be wiser to wait till to-morrow?"

"Perhaps so, if I could make sure of there being one for me. Oh! Doctor Lankester, if you knew how badly I want to see her you would not refuse my request."

His words contained a touching pathos, which went straight to the good doctor's heart. He would have given half he possessed to insure for Bob not one but many to-morrows; the sick man was so gentle and patient. He recognized with such docility and submission that life was but nature's plaything—a toy to be broken up at any moment, and hurled into the unfathomable abyss of eternity. He repined not, neither did he bemoan his hard fate. He was content to go—content to leave the cold, pitiless earth, the winter snows and summer sunshine, content even to part from his beloved; because she was not *his* beloved, but another's.

Only a little common tragedy every day played out to the bitter end by men and women possessing loving and tenacious

hearts. As Dot had truly said, "Oh! the pity of it. The pity of it."

Quarter of an hour afterwards, the girl entered Bob's presence. He had altered so much in these few days that she hardly knew him, and the change shocked her to such an extent that she was seized by a fit of trembling. For his sake she had determined to be brave and composed. What were her bravery and composure worth, since at one sight of the invalid they vanished?

The tears trickled down her cheeks, and she bowed her head and sobbed aloud.

Her emotion affected him deeply.

"Dot," he said in a quavering voice, "don't cry, dear. There's nothing to cry about."

"Oh! Mr. Jarrett, I—I can't help it. I meant to behave well, indeed I did."

"Call me Bob, will you? I should like to hear you call me by my Christian name just for once, and," with a spasm of pain, "I don't think Will would be jealous."

"Hush!" she cried, in an altered voice, "don't talk of Will."

"I must. It is for that purpose I have sent for you. The other day you told me that you wanted five thousand pounds——"

"Oh, Mr. Jarrett—Bob, pray don't think of my foolish words."

He raised himself on one elbow, and looked at her.

"Dot," he said, "I hope you believe that I love you well enough to serve you."

"Yes, yes, indeed. I don't deserve such love as yours."

"If it pleases me to make you a gift of five thousand pounds, and to render you and Will happy, you won't refuse me, will you? It is the last favour I may ever ask."

To his surprise, she flung herself down by the bedside, and began sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Dot!" he said in alarm, "what have I said? What have I done?"

"Oh!—you—you are—so good. Your generosity—touches me—to the quick. But—I—I—cannot take this money. Besides," she added despairingly, "it is of no use to me now."

"Why not? Are you too proud to accept even this small gift from me?"

"Proud! No, but I am crushed and miserable. Love, faith, honour, everything seems unreal and a delusion, and the ideals I have raised, the gods before whom I have bowed down and worshipped, prove brazen images that topple down at a touch." And her eyes shone fiercely.

"Dot, what do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"Bob, you said you were my friend. I wonder whether you will understand me? I have suffered the pains of Purgatory for five whole days, and never spoken of them to a soul. Now I feel

as if I could keep my sufferings to myself no longer, and must talk to somebody. Five thousand pounds," and she laughed hysterically. "You give me five thousand pounds! How noble, how generous, how good! But what is it for? what is it for?"

"To enable you to marry Will," he said as steadily as he could, for the force of her passion shook him.

She drew in her breath with a sharp, hissing sound, and when she spoke next it was in a cold, constrained voice.

"Will will not marry me. He is married already." . . . .

At these words, the life blood seemed to come tingling and surging back through Robert Jarrett's veins. It was as if an electric shock had been administered, which diffusing vitality over his whole being, snatched him back from the very jaws of death. Will married! Dot free! Good God! how different the future appeared all at once! In the suddenness of his joy, he almost forgot the girl's misery and despair. Then, as he looked at her tear-stained face, a mighty compassion made his heart swell. How she suffered, and he too had suffered, and knew what unfortunate love meant.

He put out his hand in silent sympathy, and she clasped it nervously, bowing down her head, until he could feel the hot, salt tears dropping one by one upon it.

"Dot, dear," he said presently, "tell me how this came about. You need not be afraid of me."

She stooped her lips to the hand which she held in her own, and kissed it with a sudden impulse.

"I loved him so," she said brokenly, "I thought him so good, and true, and noble. . . I would have stuck to him all my days, and not minded how poor he was, or—or what I did for him. And now it seems as if it were n—not Will I had cared for all these years, but some poor, contemptible thing, who w—when he got weary of my blind adoration had not even the courage to tell me so. But that is the way with we poor foolish women. We put our lovers up on such high pedestals, that they come tumbling down with a crash, and shatter our weak hearts to pieces." . . . .

He let her ramble on as she liked, knowing that before long she would tell him all. He saw her smarting under the first cruel pains of disillusion, of wounded pride and outraged affection. It was only natural that she should pour forth her piteous tale incoherently, and he lay back on his pillow, uttering a soft word of sympathy now and again, and trying to prevent the mad joy that possessed him from becoming too apparent. He felt that it was indecent—nay, selfish, yet would he have been mortal had not his brain reeled with intoxication at the thought that, should God spare his life, he might now win Dot—Dot, whose sweet feminine disposition revealed itself in every word!

This was the sum and substance of her tale.

For months past Will's letters had grown rarer and shorter. The girl treasured them up, and never wearied of making fresh excuses for the writer, though her woman's instinct told her that his love was no longer the same as formerly. Time and distance had cooled its ardour in a marked degree. But she struggled against the conviction, as would do any tender trusting girl in her place, and flew to meet him at the railway station, full of fluttering hope and sweet forgiveness. At the first touch of his lips she felt that some subtle alteration had taken place, that in short, an estrangement, though none of her making, divided them. He had hinted at confidences, at news which it was imperative to break, and yet maintained a torturing reserve. His talk had been chiefly about the new practice, and how it was to be acquired, and he succeeded in impressing Dot with a notion that it was her duty to find the requisite five thousand pounds, and that if she failed in doing so, the engagement between them must be considered at an end.

"Will said he should find the money if I didn't," sobbed poor Dot, through her tears; "that a man had no right to spoil his whole career on account of an early attachment, and hinted that there was somebody else willing to marry him at a moment's notice."

"The brute!" ejaculated Bob indignantly. "Just fancy any man being such a fool as to throw away a treasure like you."

Dot sighed and wept.

"I loved him so—I loved him so," she repeated piteously. "But he was not what I thought or he never could have acted as he did. If he had cared for me really, it would have been impossible to him to marry another woman, simply because she had a few thousand pounds and I had not. It is a terrible shock to discover the worthlessness of a person you have looked up to since your childhood. I feel as if I should never recover from it. See, here is the letter he sent me five days ago, every word of which is branded on my memory in characters of fire."

Bob, though tired, managed to read the contents, which were as follows:

"Dear Little Dot,—When I met you at the railway station you looked so pretty and were evidently so glad to see me, that I could not bring myself to tell you certain things which you had a right to know. I am a poor devil who has to gain his own living, and who cannot afford to marry the girl of his choice. Those five thousand pounds of which we spoke were essential to my career. I knew that I could not look to find them with you, and so—and so (you will think me a beast, and God knows I feel like one) I became engaged to a wealthy widow, several years older than myself, who for some rhyme or reason, appeared to have taken a great fancy to me. When you get this, all will be



over and I shall be married to her. Dot, can you—will you forgive me?—Yours in heart still, WILLIAM BARRINGTON.”

“The cur!” ejaculated Bob contemptuously. “He is faithful, neither to the woman he professes to love, nor to the one he has basely married for her money. Don’t be angry with me, Dot, for saying so, but I think you have had a lucky escape.”

She made no answer. Was it possible that he was right? She could not admit the fact just at present, though her aching heart cried out that it had been cruelly and treacherously deceived.

“This Will Barrington never could have been worthy of you from the beginning,” continued Bob. “A man capable of writing such a letter as that is a poor, mean-spirited hound.”

“If only he had trusted me,” said Dot bitterly, “and told me the truth, I think I could have forgiven him everything, but now—now,” and her voice shook, “I have not only lost Will, but all my faith and belief in human nature as well; so much has gone that never can come back.”

Bob gave the hand he still held in his own a gentle pressure.

“My dear, my love,” he said, “you have indeed been cruelly treated, but don’t fall into the mistake of thinking that all men are blackguards, and incapable of a true affection. Dot, darling, if you would let me try to restore your faith in man, I should very soon get well. It is you I want, you, without whom life is unendurable.”

The tears gushed afresh to her eyes. What was this feeling stirring her heart? Had she turned traitor so soon? “Don’t ask anything of me now,” she cried out in alarm. “You must give me time—you must give me time.”

A radiant smile lit up Bob’s pale face. Something in her tone and manner made him hope. “I will be very, very patient, and wait even as Jacob did for Rachel.”

She drooped her head and did not speak.

When Doctor Lankester returned from his rounds some half-an-hour later, he found Dot crying softly to herself and the patient fast asleep. He felt his pulse and turned to the girl with a look of inquiry.

“Why, Dot!” he exclaimed, “what treatment have you been pursuing? Robert Jarrett is a different man already. He has managed to turn the corner and will live.”

She just glanced up at her father; then turned her blushing face away.

How could she speak to him of the strange revolution going on within her bosom? How tell him that a new love was springing up from the very ashes of the old?

But perhaps Dr. Lankester understood without being told.

## CHAPTER XL.

## CONCLUSION.

FROM that day Bob mended rapidly. He had something to hope for now—a new object in life. Nevertheless two months went by before he regained his usual health, and then Doctor Lankester strongly advised his leaving England whilst the cold spring winds lasted. After much conversation, it was ultimately settled between this pair of friends that Bob should return to Australia, in order to wind up his affairs there, and escort his mother and sisters to their new home. But before going on so long a journey, he felt he must speak to Dot; she had been very shy and quiet of late, and yet the small germ of hope that had been planted in his heart whilst he lay so ill, had gone on growing ever since.

About a fortnight prior to his departure, he sought her out.

"Dot," he said, "I am going away."

"Yes," she answered in faltering tones, "I know that."

"Have you nothing to say to me before I leave?"

"What can I say?" she demanded with evident embarrassment.

"You told me once that—that I must give you time. I have tried and am trying very hard still to be patient; but Dot, dear, if you could speak one little word before I leave England, or give me the least encouragement, you don't know how happy it would make me."

She was trembling all over.

"What—what—do you want?"

He advanced a step nearer, and held out his arms with infinite yearning.

"I want you to tell me truly if you think you can ever get to care for me a little bit? I don't mean just yet. I have no right to expect that; but after a while—even a long while if you like it best—is there any chance of my being able to win you?"

He stopped abruptly, and for a few seconds she maintained absolute silence.

Then she began twitching at the corner of her pocket-handkerchief, and at last in a very subdued way, as if heartily ashamed of herself, said almost inaudibly, "I don't know what you will say to me. You will think me a most horribly capricious, changeable person, in short no better than a weathercock, but—but——"

"But what, Dot? For God's sake speak out, and let me know the worst."

The small, sweet face broke up into smiles, a dear little dimple showed on the rounded chin, and the clear, frank eyes looked straight into his, with an expression which made his heart beat fast. "You have won me already. I care for you a very great deal as it is."

Here was an astounding discovery. Bob could hardly believe his senses.

"And Will?" he cried sceptically, "what about him?"

The colour flew to her cheeks, dying them a vivid crimson. He meant no reproach to her constancy, but she construed it as one.

"I knew you would think poorly of me," she resumed humbly and apologetically. "I think poorly of myself, and often wonder if it is I—I, Dot Lankester, who have changed so much in such a short space of time. You have a perfect right to doubt the sincerity of my affection. Appearances are all against me. Perhaps some girls can continue to care for a man they no longer respect and esteem. I could not. It was not the actual Will Barrington I loved, but an ideal raised by my imagination. I see it now, though at the time I suffered tortures. Bob, I am not really changeable and inconstant, though probably you believe so, and if, in spite of the past, you care to make me your wife, I will do my best that you shall not regret it."

Bob was wild with delight. In the first ecstasy of his love, he vowed he would put off going to Australia, and spend the summer at Straightem Court. But Mrs. Lankester suggested a plan which positively fired his brain. "Why not," she said, "get married quietly, and take Dot out with you, as a surprise to your mother and sisters. There's not the least reason for any delay." The good lady went on the principle of striking when the iron is hot.

Bob hailed this idea rapturously. Of course, Dot said No, when it was first mooted to her, and equally, of course, the ardour of her lover and the united wishes of her parents succeeded in removing her objections. "Why not? Why shouldn't she be happy, and see a little of the world when she got a chance?"

She found it impossible to answer that question, or to resist the pressure put upon her.

So they were married without any fuss or ceremony, and a few days afterwards started off for Australia on their honeymoon. Of their various adventures *en route* it is unnecessary to speak. Suffice it that Dot completely won the hearts of her new relations, and after a delightful stay in Bob's old home, the whole party, with the exception of Dick, who was comfortably installed in the farm, returned to Straightem Court.

Before people had fairly got over the astonishment occasioned by Mr. Jarrett's wedding, there came another which surprised them still more. Lord Littelbrane conducted Lady De Fochsey to the hymeneal altar, thus administering a death-blow to the already disorganized Mutual Adorationites. Shortly after this event, his lordship was so shocked by the behaviour of some of his satellites, who actually left their cards on Mrs. Jarrett, and vowed she was a very pretty, charming woman, that he resigned the mastership of the Morbey Anstead hounds in disgust. But he was

still more annoyed when Bob took them, and by the end of his first season effected a complete revolution in the manners and customs of the Hunt. The new master soon became exceedingly popular with all classes, encouraged the presence of strangers, was civil and pleasant to everybody, and quite put Lord Littelbrane's nose out of joint.

But that unfortunate nobleman had other causes of dissatisfaction. As the years rolled on, he became a thoroughly unhappy, dissatisfied and henpecked man, who hated and feared his wife, without daring to give vent to his sentiments in her presence. He had indeed made an unlucky venture, for sad to say, Lady Littelbrane disappointed expectation; no son and heir appeared to continue the aristocratic race, and his theories of selection turned out no better than theories generally do.

By some strange, horrible and capricious freak of Nature, the long thought of and deeply pondered combination of beauty and birth, health and rank, youth and talent, failed to produce the desired results. No little sweet, shrill voices sounded in the Littelbrane apartments, no childish feet could be heard pattering down the long corridors.

Year after year his lordship's hopes faded away, and the Castle became the scene of many marital squabbles.

For Lady Littelbrane did not improve with age. She grew sharper of tongue, shorter of temper, more restless, frivolous and vain. She filled the house with fast young men, mostly of the parasitic order, and carried on barefaced flirtations with them under the very nose of her unhappy lord, whose notions of social decency were terribly shocked by such conduct. But it was useless expressing disapproval. His wife could master him, and knew it; so that he got very little domestic peace.

His chief pleasure consisted in creeping out to dine with old General Prosieboy whilst she was entertaining some of her gay acquaintances at home.

Sad to relate, that staunch warrior had made friends with the Mammon of Unrighteousness, although after a bottle of wine he would still converse fluently about the departed glory of the Mutual Adorationites.

For their sun was on the wane. The M.A.'s, indeed, almost ceased to exist. The majority had gone over to the enemy, and pretty Mrs. Robert Jarrett made many converts amongst their ranks. Her kindliness, cheeriness and sweet simplicity were hard to resist. Even the ladies, who at first turned up their noses at Dot, as "a little country doctor's daughter," were forced in time to admit that she was "quite a nice, refined and altogether unobjectionable person."

And Bob? Our honest, outspoken, manly, rough Australian of the big heart and unpolished manners?

It may please some to hear that he was very happy with his

little wife, and that they both considered their good fortune should make them extra tender to others less lucky than themselves.

There is not such another pair of match-makers in the county.

What between looking after his estate, his hounds and his children, Bob has plenty of good honest employment, which saves him from sinking down into a mere selfish and luxurious Sybarite, intent upon nothing but gratifying his own wants and wishes.

Possibly, the sharp lesson he received from a small section of English gentlemen on his first arrival in England, though not pleasant at the time, had a salutary effect, and taught him that even in the mother country there are a good many things not worthy of imitation. He may have learnt that to be kind and charitable, unselfish and unaffected, makes a man a finer gentleman than the possession of smart clothes, a bitter tongue, and an inordinate opinion of I—I—I.

THE END.

## HOMBURG IN THE SEASON.

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**H**OMBURG is very full ; so full, that as a lady aptly observed, it is nothing but a continuation of the London season with the people crammed into two or three streets. It swarms with English and Americans, so much so, that to hear German spoken is quite an exception. Since the arrival of the Prince of Wales it has been almost impossible to find lodgings, and we have heard of several parties who, after a fruitless search for rooms, were forced to return, weary and disconsolate, to Frankfort. Needless to say, that under these circumstances the prices asked are high. In the Untere Promenade, the most fashionable part of the town, often as much as from 160 to 200 marks weekly is asked and given for a sitting and two or three bed rooms. No doubt in ordinary seasons the Untere Promenade, with its cosy balconies and lofty trees, that are so tall as almost to shut out the sky, is charming; but this is *not* an ordinary season, and with the wet cold weather which has lately prevailed, it is gloomy in the extreme, and cannot compare with the Schöne Aussicht at the back of the town, where a charming view over the country is to be obtained, and where apartments are procurable at a more moderate price.

In spite of the throngs of princes, princesses, dukes and members of the aristocracy who have honoured Homburg with their presence this year, it is dull. At least, such is the general complaint. The weather is alone to blame, and puts a stop to outdoor amusements, picnics, lawn tennis, walking and driving. The beautiful promenade leading to the Elizabethan well presents quite a melancholy appearance, when people are clad in sombre-coloured waterproofs and covered by dripping umbrellas. On a bright day everything is changed. The ladies, young and old, shine out like butterflies, and white, pink, blue and yellow costumes give variety and colour to the scene. Some of the frocks are very wonderful, not to say startling, and exaggerated hats seem the fashion. But the better class dress quietly as a rule, affecting simple cotton gowns, loose garibaldis, plain sailor hats and yellow sand shoes, for the ground is very sandy and soon dries. Princess Christian and her daughters, simply dressed in black, are to be seen, morning and afternoon, walking vigorously and conscientiously up and down, after their visit to the Stahlbrunnen. The Prince of Wales, fat, jolly and good-natured, also

drinks the waters, and makes himself agreeable to the pretty girls and fashionable dames by whom he is always more or less surrounded. A faithful white Pomeranian dog, who follows closely at his master's heels, proclaims the Royal presence, and the Royal entertainer—a well-known Scottish gentleman, who of late years has succeeded in climbing the social ladder, much to his satisfaction—is generally not far off. Lawn tennis goes on in full swing every afternoon, weather permitting. There are numerous courts, and the players attract a large number of spectators, especially when a tournament is taking place. Such an expert as Renshaw does not disdain to keep himself in practice here, and performs most marvellous feats. He is, however, heavily handicapped, being usually called upon to give half the game to his opponents.

As a looker-on at lawn tennis, one becomes impressed by the advantage it is to a girl to be able to play fairly well, and to stand hour after hour volleying and taking balls. Firstly, she is thrown in the society of men; secondly, she makes new masculine acquaintances; and thirdly, if she has a decent figure, and is neatly dressed, people are sure to inquire who she is. In short, it brings her into notice and serves her in better stead than any number of ordinary accomplishments, such as playing, singing, &c. Between the lawn tennis and the dancing of an evening, Homburg ought to be a veritable paradise for young ladies. Yet although there are many flirtations, matches, it appears, are rare. Not more than one in a season generally comes off. This may, of course, be due to the scarcity of eligibles. The fair sex preponderate at Homburg as elsewhere, and the men are mostly old and gouty, trying to work off the excesses of a London season by a judicious course of the waters, or else mere striplings, accompanying their mothers and sisters. As a frisky matron pathetically observed: "No good men ever dream of coming to a place like this. They are all either shooting or fishing at this time of year. I am having a high old time among the octogenarians, but——" and she shrugged her shapely shoulders, in a manner more expressive than words.

During the season the flower girls do a roaring trade. Flowers, and particularly roses, are quite a speciality of Homburg. Every morning, regularly as clockwork, a tap comes at your sitting-room door and in comes a broad-faced, wide-waisted German bearing a large basket, full of lovely floral contents. Certainly they arrange them most tastefully. Now you are offered a cushion with the colours symmetrically arranged in rows; then a photograph frame, composed entirely of yellow roses, interspersed with brown and red leaves, the effect of which is charming; again you are tempted by a graceful wire basket, filled with moss and flowers, which climb up even to the very handle. The flower girls seem to vie with each other in ingenuity. Imagine, if you can, a floral swan, his



white neck formed of snowy pinks wedged tightly together, and his wings composed of a delicate, long-pointed, lemon-tinted leaf. He was quite a work of art, but too stiff to be really beautiful.

Three times a day the band plays—morning, afternoon and evening. On a fine night it is very pleasant to stroll out on to the terrace at the Kursaal and there listen to the strains of Meyerbeer, Mozart and Rossini, or the weird mystic music of Wagner, whilst the blue sky overhead grows darker and darker, and the rounded tree tops sway gently to and fro, and the clear crescent moon glides out from behind them. Or one can take a seat close to the kiosk where the musicians play, under the leafy limes, whose dark stems, lit up by two golden globes of gas, resemble the aisles of a cathedral. About once a week during the season the gardens of the Kursaal are illuminated. Hundreds of large Chinese lanterns—green, red and yellow—are hung round the trees. Their effect is indescribably beautiful, as they swing backwards and forwards, and light up with their various tints the masses of soft foliage. Occasionally there is a procession of men and boys, bearing banners and torches, who march round the grounds, their dark figures resembling those of dusky savages, as they wind their way through the black trunks of the numerous trees. One could fancy oneself transported to fairyland. But over all the red lights, the green and the blue, the fireworks and electric displays, reigns the great darkling sky—vast, impenetrable, illimitable, beautiful and serene, dwarfing the artifices of man and making them appear infinitely petty in comparison. It seems to say, "Oh, ye poor frivolous fools! What are rockets, and torches, and candles compared to me? What beauty can you see in them contrasted with mine?"

But people come to Homburg to be frivolous. The majority do not cherish serious thoughts; they prefer the dancing, the gas, the brilliant rooms and the meaningless chatter of their kind to Nature. A nod from the Prince fills them with more rapture than the still serenity of night, or the soul-stirring influences of sweet music.

There are many pretty drives to be taken in the vicinity of Homburg. The roads are excellent, but dusty. On a bright day their white glare would be almost intolerable to the eyes, were it not for the shady trees that border the highway on either side. Near the town they consist mostly of limes or horse chestnuts, but once fairly in the country, apple and pear trees take their place. They grow to a huge size, and at this time of year are laden with fruit. Their drooping branches are supported by long slender poles stuck in the ground at every possible angle, and a single tree is often surrounded by a dozen or fourteen of these substantial props. The wild ash grows in profusion. Some have bright scarlet berries, others, deeper in tone, hang out joyous clusters of glowing cardinal, whose beauty when contrasted with the grey-green

leaves is most striking, and gladdens the eye to rest upon. Poplars, too, are plentiful, and there is a magnificent grove of them just before reaching the celebrated "Tannen Wald" or pine wood leading to Saalburg. In this wood the trees grow so thickly that even on a brilliant summer's day only an occasional gleam of sunlight penetrates to their dark depths. The trunks have been shorn of their lower branches and stand up straight and bare like sentinels. The road is so narrow as scarcely to permit of one carriage passing the other, and overhead, the spreading crowns of the pines meet like a dome. The effect is exactly that produced by a long tunnel through which the light is faintly seen at each end. The innumerable rows of slender dusky columns are grand in the extreme, but it is a relief to get out into the sunshine again. The country resembles one vast nursery garden. There are no hedges as at home; nothing to divide the land into fields. It is cultivated in long narrow strips of corn, potatoes, turnips, buck wheat, asparagus, &c.

Cottages are very rare. The labouring portion of the community live principally in villages, often a considerable distance from their work. Women are frequently to be seen agriculturally employed, clad in dark cotton skirts, loose blouses and a bright handkerchief tied over their head to protect it from the warmth of the sun. Both cows and dogs are put in harness. The former draw the common country carts, having brass brow bands beneath their horns, from which they pull. Often they have considerable loads, such as coals, bricks and manure. The dogs are large and fine, and are invariably muzzled. One pities the poor fellows. According to our English notions a dog does not seem in his right place between the shafts, and instead of being man's friend, he is converted into his slave, and a very surly, unwilling one he looks, judging from the specimens we have seen panting up the hills at a laborious trot.

The season of Homburg is short. It seldom lasts more than two months, and on that account the lodging-house proprietors and hotel keepers are forced to make hay whilst the sun shines. Those who wish to economize would do better to select some less fashionable resort, and one less frequented by English and Americans. But those who live in the world, those who love society, and who consider meeting people and making new acquaintances the height of human happiness, will find Homburg a place after their own hearts. Here they can eat, drink, talk, flirt, hob-nob familiarly with the royalties, and all the time cherish the pleasing delusion that they are the victims of ill-health, and do an immense deal for their constitution by drinking the waters and systematically breaking every diet rule.

BIRD'S EYE.

## THE FATAL THREE.

By M. E. BRADDON,

AUTHOR OF "LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET," "VIXEN," "ISHMAEL," "LIKE AND UNLIKE,"  
ETC., ETC., ETC.

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### CHAPTER II.

#### PAMELA CHANGES HER MIND.

LUCIFER himself, after his fall, could not have felt worse than César Castellani when he followed Mildred Greswold to Nice, as he did within a week after she left Pallanza.

He went to Nice partly because he was an idle man, and had no desire to go back to English east winds just at this season when the glory of the southern springtide was beginning. He was tolerably well furnished with money, and Nice was as good to him as any other place, while the neighbourhood of Monte Carlo was always an attraction. He followed in Mildred's footsteps therefore; but he had no idea of forcing himself upon her presence for some time to come. He knew that his chances were ruined in that quarter for the time being, if not for ever.

This was his first signal overthrow. Easy conquests had so demoralized him that he had grown to consider all conquests easy. He had unlimited faith in the charm of his own personality—his magnetic power as he called it; and, behold! his magnetic power had failed utterly with this lovely, lonely woman, who should have turned to him in her desolation as the flowers turn to the sun.

For once in his life he had overrated himself and his influence, and in so doing he had lost the chance of a very respectable alliance.

"Fifteen hundred a year would be at least bread and cheese," he reflected, "and to marry an English heiress of a good old family would solidify my position in society. The girl is pretty enough, and I could twist her round my finger. She would bore me frightfully, but every man must suffer something. There is always a discord somewhere amidst the harmony of life; and if one's teeth are not too often set on edge one should be content."

He remembered how contemptuously he had rejected the idea of such a marriage in his talk with Miss Fausset, and how she had been set upon it.

"I should stand ever so much better with her if I married well, and solidified myself into British respectability. I might naturalize myself, and go into Parliament perhaps, if that would please

the good soul at Brighton. What will she leave me when she dies, I wonder? She is muter than the Sphinx upon that point. And will she ever die? Brighton is famous for pauper females of ninety and upwards, and a woman like Miss Fausset, who lives in cotton wool and who has long done with the cares and passions of life, might last a century. I don't see any brilliancy in the prospect *there*; but so long as I please her and do well in the world, she will no doubt be generous."

He told himself that it was essential he should make some concession to Miss Fausset's prejudices now that he had failed with Mildred. So long as he had hoped to win that nobler prize he had been careless how he jeopardized the favour of his elderly patroness. But now he felt that her favour was all in all to him, and that the time for trifling had gone by.

She had been very generous to him during the years that had gone by since she first came to his aid almost unasked, and helped him to pay his college debts. She had come to the rescue many times since that juvenile entanglement, and her patience had been great. Yet she had not failed to remonstrate with him at every fresh instance of folly and self-indulgent extravagance. She had talked to him with an unflinching directness; she had refused further help; but somehow she had always given way, and the cheque had been written.

Again and again she had warned him that there were limits even to her forbearance.

"If I saw you working earnestly and industriously, I should not mind, even if you were a failure," said his benefactress severely.

"I have worked, and I have produced a book which was *not* a failure," replied César, with his silkiest air.

"One book in a decade of so-called literary life! Did the success of that book result in the payment of a single debt?"

"Dearest lady, would you have a man waste his own earnings—the first fruits of his pen—the grains of fairy gold that filtered through the mystic web of his fancy—would you have him fritter away that sacred product upon importunate hosiers or threatening bootmakers? *That* money was altogether precious to me. I kept it in my waistcoat pocket as long as ever I could. The very touch of the coin thrilled me. I believe cabmen and crossing sweepers had most of it in the end," he concluded, with a regretful sigh.

Miss Fausset had borne with his idleness and his vanity, as indulgent mothers bear with their sons; but he felt that she was beginning to tire of him. There were reasons why she should always continue forbearing; but he wanted to insure himself something better than reluctant aid.

These considerations being taken into account, Mr. Castellani was fain to own to himself that he had been a fool in rejecting the substance for the shadow, however alluring the lovely shade might be.

"But I loved her," he sighed, "I loved her as I had never loved until I saw her fair Madonna face amidst the century-old peace of her home. She filled my life with a new element. She purified and exalted my whole being. And she is thrice as rich as that silly prattling girl!" He ground his teeth at the remembrance of his failure. There had been no room for doubt. Those soft violet eyes had been transformed by indignation, and had flashed upon him with angry fire. That fair Madonna face had whitened to marble with suppressed passion. Not by one glance, not by one tremor in the contemptuous voice had the woman he loved acknowledged his influence.

He put up at the "Cosmopolitan," got in half-a-dozen French novels of the most advanced school from Galignani, and kept himself very close for a week or two; but he contrived to find out what the ladies at the "Westminster" were doing through Albrecht, the courier, who believed him to be Miss Ransome's suitor, and was inclined to be communicative, after being copiously treated to *bocks* or *petits verres*, as the occasion might suggest.

From Albrecht Castellani heard how Miss Ransome spent most of her time at the Palais Montano, or gadding about with her ladyship and Mrs. Murray, how, in Albrecht's private opinion, the balls and other dissipations of Nice were turning that young lady's head; how Mrs. Greswold went for lonely drives day after day, and would not allow Albrecht to show her the beauties of the neighbourhood, which it would have been alike his duty and pleasure to have done. He had ascertained that her favourite, and, indeed, habitual, drive was to St. Jean, where she was in the habit of leaving the fly at the little inn while she strolled about the village in a purposeless manner. All this appeared to Albrecht as eccentric and absurd, and beneath a lady of Mrs. Greswold's position. She would have employed her time to more advantage in going on distant excursions in a carriage and pair, and in lunching at remote hotels, where Albrecht would have been sure of a *bonne main* from a gratified landlord, as well as his commission from the livery stable.

Castellani heard with displeasure of Pamela's dancings and junketings, and he decided that it was time to throw himself across her pathway. He had not been prepared to find that she could enjoy life without him; her admiration of him had been so transparent, her sentimental fancy so naively revealed, and he had thought himself the sultan of her heart, having only to throw the handkerchief whenever it might suit him to claim his prey. Much as he prided himself upon his knowledge of the female heart, he had never estimated the fickleness of a shallow sentimental character like Pamela's. No man, with a due regard to the value and dignity of his sex, could conceive the rapidity or the ruthlessness with which a young lady of this temperament will transfer her affections and her large assortment of daydreams

and romantic fancies from one man to another. No man could conceive her capacity for admiring in Number Two all those qualities which were lacking in Number One. No man could imagine the exquisite adaptability of girlhood to surrounding circumstances.

Had Castellani taken Miss Ransome when she was in the humour he would have found her the most amiable and yielding of wives; a model English wife, ready to adapt herself in all things to the will and the pleasure of her husband; unselfish, devoted, unassailable in her belief in her husband as the first and best of men. But he had not seized his opportunity. He had allowed nearly a month to go by since his defeat at Pallanza; and he had allowed Pamela to discover that life might be endurable, nay, even pleasant without him.

And now, hearing that the young lady was gadding about, and divining that such gadding was the high road to forgetfulness, Mr. Castellani made up his mind to resume his sway over Miss Ransome's fancy without loss of time. He called upon a dashing American matron whom he had visited in London and Paris, and who was now the occupant of a villa on the Promenade des Anglais, and in her drawing-room he fell in with several of his London acquaintances. He found, however, that his American friend, Mrs. Montagu Brown, had not yet succeeded in being invited to the Palais Montano, and only knew Lady Lochinvar and Miss Ransome by sight.

"Her ladyship is too stand-offish for my taste," said Mrs. Montagu Brown, "but the girl seems friendly enough—no style—not as we Americans understand style. I am told she ranks as an heiress in her own country, but at the last ball at the Cercle she wore a frock that I should call dear at forty dollars. That young Stuart is after her evidently. I hope you are going to the dance next Tuesday, Mr. Castellani; I want some one nice to talk to now my waltzing days are over."

Castellani urged that Mrs. Montagu Brown was in the heyday of a dancer's age, and would be guilty of gross cruelty in abandoning that delightful art.

"Don't talk bosh," said Mrs. Montagu Brown, with perfect good humour. "There are plenty of women who don't know when they're old, but every woman knows when she's fat. When my waist came to twenty-eight inches, I knew it was time to leave off waltzing, and I was pretty good at it too in my day, I can tell you."

"With that carriage you must have been divine," replied César; "and I believe the Venus de Milo's waist must measure over twenty-eight inches."

"The Venus de Milo has no more figure than the peasant woman one sees on the promenade, women who seem as if they set their faces against the very idea of a waist. Be sure you get a ticket for Tuesday, I love to have some clever men about me wherever I go."



"I shall be there," said Castellani, bending over his hostess, and imparting a gentle confidential pressure to her fat white hand by way of leave-taking, before he slipped silently from the room.

He had studied the art of departure as if it were a science, never lingered, never hummed and hawed, never said he must go and didn't, never apologized for going so soon while everybody was pining to get rid of him.

The next day there was a battle of flowers; not the great floral *fête* before the sugar-plum carnival, but the altogether secondary affair of Mid-Lent, pleasant enough in the warmer weather of advancing spring.

Every one of any importance was on the promenade, and amongst the best carriages appeared Lady Lochinvar's barouche, decorated with white camellias and carmine carnations. She had carefully eschewed that favourite mixture of camellias and Parma violets which had always a half-mourning or funeral air. Malcolm Stuart and Miss Ransome sat side by side on the front seat with a great basket of carnations on their knees, with which they pelted their acquaintance, while Lady Lochinvar, in brown velvet and ostrich plumage, reposed at her ease in the back of the spacious carriage and enjoyed the fun without any active participation.

It was Pamela's first experience in flower fights, and to her the scene seemed enchanting. The afternoon was peerless. She wore a white gown, as if it had been Midsummer; and white gowns were the rule in most of the carriages. The sea was turquoise deepening to sapphire. The white and pink walls, the green shutters and orange trees, cactus and palm, made up a picture of a city in fairyland, taken as a background for a triple procession of carriages, all smothered with Parma violets, Dijon roses, camellias, and narcissus, with here and there some picturesque arrangement of oranges and lemons.

The carriages moved at a foot-pace; the pavements were crowded with smart people, who joined in the contest. Pamela's lap was full of bouquets, which fell from her in showers as she stood up every now and then to fling a handful of carnations into a passing carriage.

Presently, while she was standing thus, flushed and sparkling, she saw a face on the footpath by the sea, and paled suddenly at the sight.

It was César Castellani, sauntering slowly along, in a short coat of light-coloured cloth, and a felt hat of exactly the same delicate shade. He came to the carriage door. There was a block at the moment, and he had time to talk to the occupants.

"How do you do, Lady Lochinvar? You have not forgotten me, I hope—César Castellani—though it is such ages since we met."

He only lifted his hat to Lady Lochinvar, waiting for her recognition, but he held out his hand to Pamela.



"How do you like Nice, Miss Ransome? As well as Pallanza, I hope?"

"Ever so much better than Pallanza."

There was a time when that coat and hat, the *soupçon* of dark blue velvet waistcoat just showing underneath the pale buff collar, the loose China silk handkerchief carelessly fastened with a priceless intaglio, the gardenia, and pearl grey gloves would have ensnared Pamela's fancy: but that time was past. She thought that César's costume looked effeminate and underbred beside the stern simplicity of Mr. Stuart's heather-mixture *complet*. The scales had fallen from her eyes, and she recognized the bad taste and the vanity involved in that studied carelessness, that artistic colouring.

She remembered what Mildred had said of Mr. Castellani, and she was deliberately cold. Lady Lochinvar was gracious, knowing nothing to the Italian's discredit.

"I remember you perfectly," she said, shaking hands. "You have changed very little in all these years. Be sure you come and see me. I am at home at five almost every afternoon."

The carriage moved on, and Pamela sat in an idle reverie for the next ten minutes, although the basket of carnations was only half empty.

She was thinking how strange it was that her heart beat no faster. Could it be that she was cured—and so soon? It was even worse than a cure; it was a positive revulsion of feeling. She was vexed with herself for ever having exalted that overdressed foreigner into a hero. She felt she had been un-English, unwomanly even, in her exaggerated admiration of an exotic. And then she glanced at Malcolm Stuart, and averted her eyes with a conscious blush on seeing him earnestly observant of her.

He was plain, certainly. His features had been moulded roughly, but they were not bad features. The lines were rather good in fact, and it was a fine manly countenance. He was fair and slightly freckled, as became a Scotchman; his eyes were clear and blue, but could be compared with neither sapphires nor violets, and his eyelashes were lighter than any cultivated young lady could approve. The general tone of his hair and complexion was ginger; and ginger, taken in connection with masculine beauty, is not all one would wish. But then ginger is almost the pervading note in the household brigade, and it is a hue which harmonizes agreeably with flashing helmets and shell jackets. No doubt Mr. Stuart had looked very nice in his uniform. He had certainly appeared to advantage in a Highland costume at the fancy ball the other night, some people pronounced him the finest-looking man in the room.

And again good looks are of little importance in a man. A plainish man, possessed of all the manly accomplishments, a crack shot and a crack rider, can always appear to advantage in English society. Pamela was beginning to think more kindly of sporting men, and even of Sir Henry Mountford.

"I'm sure Mr. Stuart would get on with him," she thought, dimly foreseeing a day when Sir Henry and her new acquaintance would be brought together somehow.

César Castellani took immediate advantage of Lady Lochinvar's invitation. He presented himself at the Palais Montano on the following afternoon, and he found Pamela established there as if she belonged to the house. It was she who poured out the tea and dispensed those airy little hot cakes, which were a kind of idealized galette, served in the daintiest of embroidered doylis, resplendent with Lady Lochinvar's cipher and coronet.

Mr. and Mrs. Murray were there, and Malcolm Stuart, the chief charm of whose society seemed to consist in his exhibition of an accomplished Dandie Dinmont, which usurped the conversation, and which Castellani would have liked to innocuate with the most virulent form of rabies. Pamela squatted on a little stool at the creature's feet, and assisted in showing him off. She had acquired a power over him which indicated an acquaintance of some standing.

"What fools girls are," thought Castellani.

His conquests among women of maturer years had been built upon rock as compared with the shifting quicksand of a girl's fancy. He began to think the genus girl beneath contempt.

"He has but one fault," said Pamela, when the terrier had gone through various clumsy evolutions in which the bandyness of his legs and the length of his body had been shown off to the uttermost. "He cannot endure Box, and Box detests him. They never meet without trying to murder each other, and I'm very much afraid," bending down to kiss the broad hairy head, "that Dandy is the stronger."

"Of course he is. Box is splendid for muscle, but weight must tell in the long run," replied Mr. Stuart.

"My grandmother had a Dandy whose father belonged to Sir Walter Scott," began Mrs. Murray; "he was just a pair-r-r-fect dog, and my mamma——"

Castellani fled from this inanity. He went to the other end of the room where Lady Lochinvar was listening listlessly to Mr. Murray, laid himself out to amuse her ladyship for the next ten minutes, and then departed without so much as a look at Pamela.

"The spell is broken," he said to himself as he drove away. "The girl is next door to an idiot. No doubt she will marry that sandy Scotchman. Lady Lochinvar means it, and a silly pated miss like that can be led with a thread of floss silk. *Moi, je m'en fiche.*"

About a week after Mr. Castellani's reappearance Mildred Greswold received a letter from Brighton, which made a sudden change in her plans.

It was from Mr. Maltravers, the incumbent of St. Edmund's :

"St. Edmund's Vicarage.

"DEAR MRS. GRESWOLD,

"After our thoroughly confidential conversations last autumn I feel justified in addressing you upon a subject which I know is very near to your heart, namely, the health and welfare, spiritual as well as bodily, of your dear aunt, and my most valued parishioner, Miss Fausset. The condition of that dear lady has given me considerable uneasiness during the last few months. She has refused to take her hand from the plough; she labours as faithfully as ever in the Lord's vineyard; but I see with deepest regret that she is no longer the woman she was, even a year ago. The decay has been sudden, and it has been rapid. Her strength begins to fail her, though she will hardly admit as much, even to her medical attendant; and her spirits are less equable than of old. She has intervals of extreme depression, against which the efforts of friendship, the power of spiritual consolation, are unavailing.

"I feel it my duty to inform you, as one who has a right to be interested in the disposal of Miss Fausset's wealth, that my benefactress has consummated the generosity of past years by a munificent gift. She has endowed her beloved Church of St. Edmund with an income, which, taken in conjunction with the pew rents, an institution which I hope hereafter to abolish, raises the priest of the temple from penury to comfort, and affords him the means of helping the poor of his parish with his alms as well as with his prayers and ministrations. This noble gift closes the long account of beneficence betwixt your dear aunt and St. Edmund's. I have nothing further to expect from her for my church or for myself. It is fully understood between us that this gift is final. You will understand, therefore, that I am thoroughly disinterested in my anxiety for this precious life.

"You, dear Mrs. Greswold, are your aunt's only near relative, and it is but right you should be the companion and comforter of her declining days. That the shadow of the grave is upon her I can but fear, although medical science sees but slight cause for alarm. A year ago she was a vigorous woman, spare of habit, certainly, but with a hardness of bearing and manner which promised a long life. To-day she is a broken woman, nervous, fitful, and, I fear, unhappy, though I can conceive no cause for sadness in the closing years of such a noble life as hers has been, unselfish, devoted to good works and exalted thoughts. If you can find it compatible with your other ties to come to Brighton, I would strongly recommend you to come without loss of time, and I believe that the change which you will yourself perceive in my valued friend will fully justify the course I take in thus addressing you.

"I am ever, dear Mrs. Greswold,

"Your friend and servant,

"SAMUEL MALTRAVERS."

Mildred gave immediate orders to courier and maid, her trunks were to be packed that afternoon, a *coupé* was to be taken in the Rapide for the following day, and they were to go straight through to Paris. But when she announced this fact to Pamela the damsel's countenance expressed utmost despondency.

"Upon my word, aunt, you have a genius for taking one away from a place just when one is beginning to be happy," she exclaimed in irrepressible vexation.

She apologized directly after upon hearing of Miss Fausset's illness.

"I am a horrid, ill-tempered creature," she said; "but I really am beginning to adore Nice. It is a place that grows upon one."

"What if I were to leave you for two or three weeks with Lady Lochinvar? She told me the other day that she would like very much to have you to stay with her. You might stay till she leaves Nice, which will be in about three weeks time, and you could travel with her to Paris. You could go from Paris to Brighton very comfortably, with Peterson to take care of you. Perhaps you would not mind leaving Nice when Lady Lochinvar goes?"

Pamela sparkled and blushed at the suggestion.

"I should like it very much, if Lady Lochinvar is in earnest in asking to have me."

"I am sure she is in earnest. There is only one stipulation I must make, Pamela. You must promise me not to renew your intimacy with Mr. Castellani."

"With all my heart, aunt. My eyes have been opened. He is thoroughly bad style."

### CHAPTER III.

#### AS THE SANDS RUN DOWN.

MILDRED was in Brighton upon the third day after she left Nice. She had sent no intimation of her coming to her aunt, lest her visit should be forbidden. A nervous invalid is apt to have fancies, and to resent anything that looks like being taken care of. She arrived therefore unannounced, left her luggage at the station, and drove straight to Lewes Crescent, where the butler received her with every appearance of surprise.

It was late in the afternoon, and Miss Fausset was sitting in her accustomed chair in the back drawing-room, near the fire, and with her book table on her right hand. The balmy spring-time which Mildred had left at Nice was unknown in Brighton, where the season had been exceptionally cold, and where a jovial northeaster was holding its revels all over Kemp Town, and enlivening the sea, where Neptune's white horses were careering gaily over the grey expanse. A pleasant bracing day for robust health and

animal spirits ; but not altogether the kind of atmosphere to suit an elderly spinster suffering from nervous depression.

Miss Fausset started up, flushed with surprise, at Mildred's entrance. Her niece had kept her acquainted with her movements, but had told her nothing of the drama of her existence since she left Brighton.

"My dear child, I am very glad to see you back," she said gently. "You are come to stay with me for a little while, I hope, before——?"

She hesitated, and looked at Mildred earnestly.

"Are you reconciled to your husband?" she asked abruptly.

"Reconciled?" echoed Mildred, "we have never quarrelled. He is as dear to me to-day as he was the day I married him—dearer for all the years we spent together. But we are parted for ever. You know that it must be so, and you know why."

"I hoped that time would have taught you common sense."

"Time has only confirmed my resolution. Do not let us argue the point, aunt. I know that you mean kindly—but I know that you are false to your own principles—to all the teaching of your life—when you argue on the side of wrong."

Miss Fausset turned her head aside impatiently. She had sunk back into her chair after greeting Mildred, and her niece perceived that she, who used to sit erect as a dart, in the most uncompromising attitude, was now propped up with cushions, against which her wasted figure leaned languidly.

"How have you got through the winter, aunt?" Mildred asked presently.

"Not very well. It has tried me more than any other winter I can remember. It has been a long weary winter. I have been obliged to give up the greater part of my district work. I held on as long as ever I could, till my strength failed me. And now I have to trust the work to others. I have my lieutenants—Clara and Emily Newton—who work for me. You remember them, perhaps. Earnest good girls. They keep me *en rapport* with my poor people—but it is not like personal intercourse. I begin to feel what it is to be useless—to cumber the ground."

"My dear aunt, how can you talk so? Your life has been so full of usefulness that you may well afford to take rest now that your health is not quite so good as it has been. Even in your drawing-room here you are doing good. It is only right that young people should carry out your instructions and work for you. I have heard, too, of your munificent gift to St. Edmund's."

"It is nothing, my dear; when all is counted, it is nothing. I have tried to lead a righteous life. I have tried to do good—but now sitting alone by this fire day after day, night after night, it all seems vain and empty. There is no comfort in the thought of it all, Mildred. I have had the praise of men, but never the approval of my own conscience."

There was a silence of some moments, Mildred feeling at a loss for any fitting words of comfort or cheerfulness.

"Then you are not going back to your husband?" her aunt asked abruptly, as if in forgetfulness of all that had been said, and then, suddenly recollecting herself, "you have made up your mind, you say. Well, in that case you can stay with me—make this your home. You may take up my work perhaps—by-and-by."

"Yes, aunt, I hope I may be able to do so. My life has been idle and useless since my great sorrow. I want to learn to be of more use in the world—and you can teach me, if you will."

"I will, Mildred. I want you to be happy. I have made my will. You will inherit all I have to leave, after some small legacies to my servants, and five hundred pounds to César Castellani."

"My dear aunt, I don't want——"

"No, you are rich enough already, I know; but I should like you to have still larger means, to profit by my death. You will use your wealth for the good of others—as I have tried—feebly tried—to use mine. You will be rich enough to found a sisterhood, if you like, the Sisters of St. Edmund. I have done all I mean to do for the church. Mr. Maltravers knows that."

"Dear aunt, why should we talk of these things? You have many years of life before you, I hope."

"No, Mildred, the end is not far off. I feel worn out and broken. I am a doomed woman."

"But you have had no serious illness since I was here?"

"No, no, nothing specific; only languor, and shattered nerves, loss of appetite, sleeplessness; the sure indications of decay. My doctor can find no name for my malady. He tries one remedy after another, until I am weary of his experiments. I am glad you have come to me, Mildred—but I should be gladder if you were going back to your husband."

"Oh, aunt, why do you say things which you know must torture me?"

"Because I am worried by your folly. Well, I will say no more. You will stay with me and comfort me, if you can. What have you done with Pamela?"

Mildred told her aunt about Lady Lochinvar's invitation.

"Ah, she is with Lady Lochinvar—a very frivolous person, I suppose. Your husband's niece is a well-meaning, silly girl; sure to get into mischief of some kind. Is she still in love with César Castellani?"

"I think not. I hope not. I believe she is cured of that folly."

"You call it a folly. Well, perhaps you are right. It may be foolishness for a girl to follow the blind instinct of her heart."

"For an impulsive girl like Pamela."

"Yes, no doubt she is impulsive, generous and uncalculating, a

girl hardly to be trusted with her own fate," said Miss Fausset with a sigh, and then she lapsed into silence.

Mr. Maltravers had not exaggerated the change in her. It was only too painfully evident. Her whole manner and bearing had altered since Mildred had seen her last. Physically and mentally her whole nature seemed to have relaxed and broken down. It was as if the springs that sustained the human machine had snapped. The whole mechanism was out of gear. She who had been so firm of speech and meaning, who had been wont to express herself with a cold and cutting decisiveness, was now feeble and irresolute, repeating herself, harping upon the same old string, obviously forgetful of that which had gone before.

Mildred felt that she would be only doing her duty as Miss Fausset's nearest relative in taking up her abode in the great dull house and trying to soothe the tedium of decay. She could do very little, perhaps, but the fact of near kindred would be in itself a solace; and for her own part she would have the sense of duty done.

"I will stay with you as long as you will have me, aunt," she said gently. "Albrecht is below. May I send to the station for my luggage?"

"Of course, and your rooms shall be got ready immediately. The house will be yours before very long, perhaps. It would be strange if you could not make it your home!"

She touched a spring on her book table, which communicated with the electric bell, and Franz appeared promptly.

"Tell them to get Mrs. Greswold's old rooms ready at once, and send Albrecht to the station for the luggage," ordered Miss Fausset, with something of her old decisiveness. "Louisa is with you, I suppose?" she added to her niece.

"Louisa is at the station looking after my things. Albrecht leaves me to-day. He has been a good servant, and I think he has had an easy place. I have not been an eager traveller."

"No, you seem to have taken life at a slow pace. What took you to Nice? It is not a place I should have chosen if I wanted quiet."

Mildred hesitated for some moments before she replied to this question.

"You know one part of my sorrow, aunt. I think I might trust you with the whole of that sad story. I went to Nice because it was the place where my husband lived with his first wife—where my unhappy sister died."

"She died at Nice," repeated Miss Fausset, with an abstracted air, as if her power of attention, which had revived just now, were beginning to flag.

"She died there—under the saddest circumstances. I am heart-broken when I think of her and that sad fate. My own dear Fay—my generous, loving Fay—how hard that your loving heart



should be an instrument of self-torture. She was jealous of her husband—causelessly, unreasonably jealous, and she killed herself in a paroxysm of despair.”

The awfulness of this fact roused Miss Fausset from her apathy. She started up from amongst her cushions, staring at Mildred in mute horror, and her wasted hands trembled as they grasped the arm of her chair.

“Surely, surely that can’t be true,” she faltered. “It is too dreadful. People tell such lies—an accident, perhaps, exaggerated into a suicide—an overdose of an opiate.”

“No, no, it was nothing like that. There is no doubt. I heard it from those who knew. She flung herself over the edge of the cliff—she was walking with her husband—my husband—George Greswold—then George Ransome—they were walking together—they quarrelled—he said something that stung her to the quick, and she threw herself over the cliff. It was the wild impulse of a moment, for which an all merciful God will not hold her accountable. She was in very delicate health, nervous, hysterical, and she fancied herself unloved, betrayed perhaps. Ah, aunt, think how hardly she had been used, cast off, disowned, sent out alone into the world by those who should have loved and protected her. Poor, poor Fay. My mother sent her away from The Hook where she was so happy. My mother’s jealousy drove her out—a young girl, so friendless, so lonely, so much in need of love. It was my mother’s doing—but my father ought not to have allowed it. If she was weak, he was strong, and Fay was his daughter. It was his duty to protect her against all the world. You know how I loved my father, you know that I reverence his memory, but I feel that he played a coward’s part when he sent Fay out of his house to please my mother.”

She was carried away by her passionate regret for that ill-used girl whose image had never lost its hold upon her heart.

“Not a word against your father, Mildred. He was a good man. He never failed in affection or in duty. He acted for the best according to his lights in relation to that unhappy girl—unhappy—ill-used—yes, yes, yes. He did his best, Mildred. He must not be blamed. But it is dreadful to think that she killed herself.”

“Had you heard nothing of her fate, aunt? My father must have been told, surely. There must have been some means of communication. He must have kept himself informed about her fate, although she was banished, given over to the care of strangers. If he had owned a dog which other people took care of for him he would have been told when the dog died.”

Miss Fausset felt the unspeakable bitterness of this comparison.

“You must not speak like that of your father, Mildred. You ought to know that he was a good man. Yes, he knew of course, when that poor girl died; but it was not his business to tell other people. I only heard—incidentally—that she had married, and

that she died within a year of her marriage. I heard no more. It was the end of a sad story."

Again there was an interval of silence. It was six o'clock, the sun was going down over the sea beyond the west pier, and the lawn and the fashionable garden where the gay world congregates, while this eastern end of the long white sea front was lapsing into greyness, through which a star shone dimly here and there. It looked a cold, dull world after the pink hotel and the green shutters, the dusty palms and the bright blue sea of the Promenade des Anglais; but Mildred was glad to be in England, glad to be so much nearer him whose life-companion she could never be again.

Franz brought her some tea presently, and informed her that her rooms were ready, and that Louisa had arrived with the luggage. Albrecht had left his humble duty for his honoured mistress, and was gone.

"When your father died, you looked through his papers and letters, no doubt?" said Miss Fausset presently, after a pause in the conversation.

"Yes, aunt, I looked through my dear father's letters in the library in Parchment Street, and arranged everything with our old family solicitor," answered Mildred, surprised at a question which seemed to have no bearing upon anything that had gone before.

"And you found no documents relating to—that unhappy girl?"

"Not a line—not a word. But I had not expected to find anything. The history of her birth was the one dark secret of my father's life—he would naturally leave no trace of the story."

"Naturally, if he were wiser than most people. But I have observed that men of business have a passion for preserving documents, even when they are worthless. People keep compromising papers with the idea of destroying them on their death-beds, or when they feel the end is near; and then death comes without warning, and the papers remain. Your father's end was somewhat sudden."

"Sadly sudden. When he left us that autumn he was in excellent health. The shooting had been better than usual that year, and I think he had enjoyed it as much as the youngest of our party. And then he went back to London, and the London fogs—caught cold—neglected himself—and we were summoned to Parchment Street to find him dying of inflammation of the lungs. It was terrible! Such a brief farewell—such an irreparable loss."

"I was not sent for," said Miss Fausset severely. "And yet I loved your father dearly."

"It was wrong, aunt, but we hoped against hope almost to the last. It was only within a few hours of the end that we knew the case was hopeless, and to summon you would have given him the

idea that he was dying. George and I pretended that our going to him was accidental. We were so fearful of alarming him."

"Well, I dare say you acted for the best; but it was a heavy blow for me to be told that he was gone—my only brother—almost my only friend."

"Pray don't say that, aunt. I hope you know that I love you."

"My dear, you love me because I am your father's sister. You consider it your duty to love me. My brother loved me for my own sake, loved me through thick and thin. He was a noble-hearted man."

Miss Fausset and her niece dined together *tête-à-tête*, and spent the evening quietly on each side of the hearth, with their books and work, the kind of work which encourages pensive brooding, as the needle travels slowly over the fabric.

"I wonder you have no pets, aunt—no favourite dog."

"I have never cared for that kind of affection, Mildred. I am of too hard a nature, perhaps. My heart does not open itself to dogs and cats, and parrots are my abomination. I am not like the typical spinster. My only solace in the long weary years has been in going among people who are more unhappy than myself. I have put myself face to face with sordid miseries, with heavy life-long burdens; and I have asked myself, what is *your* trouble compared with these?"

"Dear aunt, it seems to me that your life must have been particularly free from trouble and care."

"Perhaps, in its outward aspect. I am rich, and I have been looked up to. But do you think those long years of loneliness—the aimless, monotonous pilgrimage through life has not been a burden? Do you think I have not—sometimes at any rate—envied other women their children and their husbands, the atmosphere of domestic love—even with all its cares and sorrows? Do you suppose that I could live for a quarter of a century as I have lived, and not feel my isolation? I have made people care for me, through their self-interest. I have made people honour me because I have the means of helping them. But who is there who cares for me, Madalena Fausset?"

"You cannot have done so much for others without being sincerely loved in return."

"With a kind of love, perhaps—a love that has been bought."

"Why did you never marry, aunt?"

"Because I was an heiress and a good match, and distrusted every man who wanted to marry me. I made a vow to myself, before my twentieth birthday, that I would never listen to words of love or give encouragement to a lover; and I most scrupulously kept that vow. I was called a handsome woman in those days; but I was not an attractive woman at any time. Nature had made me of too hard a clay."

"It was a pity that you should keep love at arm's length."

"Far better than to have been fooled by shams, as I might have been. Don't say any more about it, Mildred. I made my vow, and I kept it."

Mildred resigned herself quietly to the idea of the dull slow life in Lewes Crescent. This duty of solacing her aunt's declining days was the only duty that remained to her, except that wider duty of caring for the helpless and the wretched. And she told herself that there would be no better school in which to learn how to help others than the house of Miss Fausset, who had given so much of her life to the poor.

She had been told to consider her aunt's house as her own, and that she was at liberty to receive Pamela there as much and as often as she liked. She did not think that Pamela would be long without a settled home. Mr. Stuart's admiration, and Lady Lochinvar's wishes had been obvious; and Mildred daily expected a gushing letter from the fickle damsel, announcing her engagement to the Scotchman.

At four o'clock on the day after Mildred's arrival, Miss Fausset's friends began to drop in for afternoon tea and talk, and Mildred was surprised to see how her aunt rallied in that long familiar society. It seemed as if the praises and flatteries of these people acted upon her like strong wine. The languid attitude, the weary expression of the pale drawn face were put aside. She sat erect again, her eyes brightened, her ear was alert to follow three or four conversations at a time; nothing escaped her. Mildred began to think that she had lived upon the praises of men rather than upon the approval of conscience—that these assiduities and flatteries of a very commonplace circle were essential to her happiness.

Mr. Maltravers came after the vesper service, full of life and conversation, vigorous, self-satisfied, with an air of Papal dominion and Papal infallibility, so implicitly believed in by his flock, that he had learned to believe as implicitly in himself. The flock was chiefly feminine, and worshipped without limit or reservation. There were husbands and sons, brothers and nephews, who went to church with their women-kind on Sunday; but these were for the most part without enthusiasm for Mr. Maltravers. Their idea of public worship scarcely went beyond considering Sunday morning service a respectable institution, not to be dispensed with lightly.

Mr. Maltravers welcomed Mildred with touching friendliness.

"I knew you would not fail your aunt in the hour of need," he said; "and now I hope you are going to stay with her, and to take up her work when she lays it down, so that the golden thread of charity and womanly love may be unbroken."

"I hope I may be able to take up her work. I shall stay with her as long as she needs me."

"That is well. You found her sadly changed, did you not?"

"Yes, she is much changed. Yet how bright she looks this afternoon; what interest she takes in the conversation."

"The flash of the falchion in the worn-out scabbard," said Mr. Maltravers.

A layman might have said sword, but Mr. Maltravers preferred falchion, as a more picturesque word. Half the success of his preaching had lain in the choice of picturesque words. There were sceptics among his masculine congregation, who said there were no ideas in his sermons, only fine words, romantic similes, a perpetual recurrence of fountains and groves, sunset splendours, and roseate dawns, golden gates and starry canopies, seas of glass, harps of gold. But if his female worshippers felt better and holier after listening to him, what could one ask more; and they all declared that it was so. They came out of church spiritualized, overflowing with Christian love, and gave their pence eagerly to the crossing-sweepers on their way home.

The dropping in and the tea-drinking went on for nearly two hours. Mr. Maltravers took four cups of tea, and consumed a good deal of bread and butter, abstaining from the chocolate biscuits and the pound cake, which the ladies of the party affected; abstaining on principle, as saints and hermits of old abstained from high living. He allowed himself to enjoy the delicate aroma of the tea, and the daintily cut bread and butter. He was a bachelor, and lived poorly upon badly cooked food at his vicarage. His only personal indulgence was in the accumulation of a theological library, in which all the books were of a High Church cast.

When the visitors were all gone Miss Fausset sank back into her chair, white and weary looking, and Mildred left her to take a little nap, while she went up to her own room, half boudoir, half dressing-room, a spacious apartment, with a fine sea view. Here she sat in a reverie, and watched the fading sky, and the slow dim stars creeping out one by one.

Was she really to take up her aunt's work, to live in a luxurious home, a lonely loveless woman, and to go out in a methodical, almost mechanical, way, so many times a week, to visit among the poor? Would such a life as that satisfy her in all the long slow years?

The time would come perhaps when she would find peace in such a life—when her heart would know no grief except the griefs of others; when she would have cast off the fetters of selfish cares and selfish yearnings, and would stand alone, as saints and martyrs, and holy women of old have stood, alone with God and His poor. There were women she knew even in these degenerate days who so lived and so worked, seeking no guerdon but the knowledge of good done in this world and the hope of the crown immortal. Her day of sacrifice had not yet come. She had not been able to dis sever her soul from the hopes and sorrows of earth. She had not been able to forget the husband she had forsaken—even for a single hour. When she knelt down to pray at night, when she woke in the morning, her thoughts were with

him. How does he bear his solitude? Has he learnt to forget me and to be happy? Those questions were ever present to her mind.

And now at Brighton, knowing herself so near him, her heart yearned more than ever for the sight of the familiar face, for the sound of the beloved voice. She pored over the time-table, and calculated the length of the journey—the time lost at Portsmouth and Bishopstoke—every minute until the arrival at Romsey, and then the drive to Enderby. She pictured the lanes in the early May—the hedgerows bursting into leaf, the banks where the primroses were fading, the tender young ferns just beginning to uncurl their feathery fronds, the spear points of the hartstongue shooting up amidst rank broad docks, and the flower on the leafless blackthorn making patches of white amongst the green.

How easy it was to reach him—how natural it would seem to hasten to him after half a year of exile, and yet she must not. She had pledged herself to honour the law; to obey the letter and the spirit of that harsh law which decreed that her sister's husband could not be hers.

She knew that he was at Enderby, and she had some ground for supposing that he was well and even contented. She had seen the letters which he had written to his niece. He had written about the shooting, his horses, his dogs, and there had been no word to indicate that he was out of health, or in low spirits. Mildred had pored over those brief letters, forgetting to return them to the rightful owner—cherishing them as if they made a kind of link between her and the love she had renounced.

How firm the hand was: that fine and individual penmanship which she had so admired in the past—the hand in which her first love letter had been written. It was but little altered in fifteen years. She recalled the happy hour when she received that first letter from her affianced husband. He had gone to London a day or two after their betrothal, eager to make all arrangements for their marriage, impatient for settlements and legal machinery which should make their union irrevocable—full of plans for immediate improvements at Enderby.

She remembered how she ran out into the garden to read that first letter—a long letter, though they had been parted less than a day when it was written. She had gone to the remotest nook in that picturesque river-side garden, a rustic bower by the water's edge, an osier arbour over which her own hands had trained the Céline Forestière roses. They were in flower on that happy day, clusters of pale yellow bloom, breathing perfume round her as she sat beneath the blossoming arch and devoured her lover's fond words. Oh, how bright life had been then for both of them; for her without a cloud.

He was well; that was something to know; but it was not enough. Her heart yearned for fuller knowledge of his life than those letters gave. Wounded pride might have prompted that



cheerful tone. He might wish her to think him happy and at ease without her. He thought that she had used him ill. It was natural, perhaps, that he should think so, since he could not see things as she saw them. He had not her deep-rooted convictions. She thought of him, and wondered about him till the desire for further knowledge grew into an aching pain. She must write to someone; she must do something to quiet this gnawing anxiety. In her trouble she thought of all her friends in the neighbourhood of Enderby; but there was no one in whom she could bring herself to confide except Mr. Rollinson, the curate. She had thought first of writing to the doctor, but he was something of a gossip, and would be likely to prattle to his patients about her letter, and her folly in forsaking so good a husband. Rollinson she felt she might trust. He was a thoughtful young man, despite his cheery manners and some inclination to facetiousness of a strictly clerical order. He was one of a large family, and had known troubles, and Mildred had been especially kind to him and to the sisters who from time to time had shared his apartments at the carpenter's, and had revelled in the gaieties of Enderby Parish, the penny-reading at the schoolhouse, the sale of work for the benefit of the choir, and occasional afternoon tea and tennis at the Manor. Those maiden sisters of the curate's had known and admired Lola, and Mr. Rollinson had been devoted to her from his first coming to the parish, when she was a lovely child of seven.

Mildred wrote fully and frankly to the curate. "I cannot enter upon the motive of our separation," she wrote, "except so far as to tell you that it is a question of principle which has parted us. My husband has been blameless in all his domestic relations, the best of husbands, the noblest of men. Loving him with all my heart, trusting and honouring him as much as on my wedding day, I yet felt it my duty to leave him. I should not make this explanation to anyone else in Enderby, but I wish you to know the truth. If people ever question you about my reasons you can tell them that it is my intention ultimately to enter an Anglican Sisterhood, or it may be to found a Sisterhood, and to devote my declining years to my sorrowing fellow creatures. This is my fixed intention, but my vocation is yet weak. My heart cleaves to the old home and all that I lost in leaving it.

"And now, my kind friend, I want you to tell me how my husband fares in his solitude. If he were ill and unhappy he would be too generous to complain to me. Tell me how he is in health and spirits. Tell me of his daily life, his amusements, occupations. There is not the smallest detail which will not interest me. You see him, I hope, often; certainly you are likely to see him oftener than anyone else in the parish. Tell me all you can, and be assured of my undying gratitude.

"Ever sincerely yours,

"MILDRED GRESWOLD."



Mr. Rollinson's reply came by return of post.

"I am very glad you have written to me, my dear Mrs. Greswold. Had I known your address I think I should have taken the initiative and written to you. Believe me, I respect your motive for the act which has, I fear, cast a blight upon a good man's life, and I will venture to say no more than that the motive should be a very strong one which forces you to persevere in a course that has wrecked your husband's happiness and desolated one of the most delightful and most thoroughly Christian homes I had ever the privilege of entering. I look back and recall what Enderby Manor was, and I think what it is now, and I can hardly compare those two pictures without tears—tears which I cannot deem unmanly, which I am not ashamed to shed.

"You ask me to tell you frankly all I can tell about your husband's mode of life, his health and spirits. All I can tell is summed up in four words. His heart is broken. In my deep concern about his desolate position, in my heartfelt regard for him, I have ventured to force my society upon him sometimes when I could not doubt it was unwelcome. He receives me with all his old kindness of manner, but I am sympathetic enough to know when a man only endures my company, and I know that his feeling is at best endurance. But I believe that he trusts me, and that he is less upon his guard with me than he is with other acquaintances. I have seen him put on an appearance of cheerfulness with other people. I have heard him talk to other people as if life had in no wise lost its interest for him. With me he drops the mask. I have seen him brooding by his hearth, as he broods when he is alone. I have heard his involuntary sighs. I have seen the image of a shipwrecked existence. Indeed, Mrs. Greswold, there is nothing else that I can tell you if you would have me truthful. You have broken his heart. You have sacrificed your love to a principle, you say. You should be very sure of your principle. You ask me as to his habits and occupations. I believe they are about as monotonous as those of a galley slave. He walks a great deal—in all weathers and at all hours—but rarely beyond his own land. I don't think he often rides; and he has not hunted once during the season. He did a little shooting in October and November quite alone. He has had no staying visitor within his doors since you left him.

"I have reason to know that he goes to the churchyard every evening at dusk, and spends some time beside your daughter's grave. I have seen him there several times when it was nearly dark, and he had no apprehension of being observed. You know how rarely any one enters our quiet little burial ground, and how complete a solitude it is at that twilight hour. I am about the only passer-by, and even I do not pass within sight of the old yew tree above your darling's resting place, unless I go a little out of

my way between the vestry door and the lych gate. I have often gone out of my way to note that lonely figure by the grave.

"Be assured, dear Mrs. Greswold, that in sending you this gloomy picture of a widowed life I have had no wish to distress you. I have exaggerated nothing. I wish you to know the truth; and if it lies within your power—without going against your conscience—to undo that which you have done, I entreat you to do so without delay. There may not be much time to be lost.

"Believe me, devotedly and gratefully your friend,

"FREDERICK ROLLINSON."

Mildred shed bitter tears over the curate's letter. How different the picture it offered from that afforded by George Greswold's own letters, in which he had written cheerily of the shooting, the dogs and horses, the changes in the seasons, and the events of the outer world. That frank, easy tone had been part of the armour of pride. He would not abase himself by the admission of his misery. He had guessed no doubt that his wife would read those letters, and he would not have her know the extent of the ruin she had wrought.

She thought of him in his solitude—pictured him beside their child's grave, and the longing to look upon him once more, unseen by him if it could be so, became too strong for her patience to bear. She determined to see with her own eyes if he were indeed as unhappy as Mr. Rollinson supposed. She, who knew him so well, would be better able to judge by his manner and bearing—better able to divine the inner workings of his heart and mind. It had been a habit of her life to read his face—to guess his thoughts before they found expression in words. He had never been able to keep a secret from her, except that long-hidden story of the past; and even there she had known that there was something. She had seen the shadow of that abiding remorse.

"I am going to leave you for two days, aunt," she said rather abruptly on the morning after she received Mr. Rollinson's letter. "I want to look at Lola's grave. I shall go from here to Enderby as fast as the train will take me; spend an hour in the churchyard; go on to Salisbury for the night, and come back to you to-morrow afternoon."

"You mean that you are going back to your husband."

"No; no. I may see him, perhaps—by accident. I shall not enter the Manor House. I am going to the churchyard—nowhere else."

"You would be wiser if you went straight home—remember, years hence, when I am dead and gone, that I told you as much. You must do as you like—stay at an inn at Salisbury, while your own beautiful home is empty, or anything else that is foolish and wrongheaded. You had better let Franz go with you."

"Thanks, aunt; I would not take him away on any account. I can get on quite well by myself."

She left Brighton at mid-day; lost a good deal of time at the two junctions, and drove to within a few hundred yards of Enderby Church, just as the bright May day was melting into evening. There was a path across some meadows at the back of the village that led to the churchyard. She stopped the fly by the meadow gate, and told the man to drive round to Mr. Rollinson's lodgings and wait for her there, and then she walked slowly along the narrow footpath, between the long grass, golden with buttercups in the golden evening.

It was a lovely evening. There was a little wood of oaks and chestnuts on her left hand as she approached the churchyard, and the shrubberies of Enderby Manor were on her right. The trees she knew so well—her own trees—the tall mountain ash and the clump of beeches rose above the lower level of lilacs and laburnums, acacia and rose-maple. There was a nightingale singing in the thick foliage yonder—there was always a nightingale at this season somewhere in the shrubbery. She had lingered many a time with her husband to listen to that unmistakable melody.

The dense dark foliage of the churchyard made an inky blot amidst all that vernal greenery. Those immemorial yews, which knew no change with the changing years, spread their broad shadows over the lowly graves, and made night in God's acre while it was still daylight in the world outside. Mildred went into the churchyard as if into the realm of death. The shadows closed round her on all sides, and the change from light to gloom chilled her as she walked slowly towards the place where her child was lying.

Yes; he was there; just as the curate had told her. He stood leaning against the long horizontal branch of the old yew, looking down at the broad white marble cross which bore his daughter's name. He was very pale, and his sunken eyes and hollow cheeks told of failing health. He stood motionless, in a gloomy reverie. His wife watched him from a little way off. She stood motionless as himself—stood and watched him till the beating of her heart sounded so loud in her own ears that she thought he too must hear that passionate throbbing.

She had thought when she set out on her journey that it would be sufficient for her just to see him, and that having seen him she would go away and leave him without his ever knowing that she had looked upon him. But now the time had come, it was not enough. The impulse to draw nearer and to speak to him was too strong to be denied. She went with tottering footsteps to the side of the grave, and called him by his name—

"George! George!" holding out her hands to him piteously.

*(To be concluded.)*

## SOCIAL ECHOES.

By MRS. HUMPHRY.

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IT is not always true that "absence makes the heart grow fonder," but in the case of meeting one's friends again in town after the *villeggiatura*, there is no doubt that a keener sense of pleasure is felt than that with which we met them at the last gatherings of the season. It is agreeable to compare experiences of the holiday time, and to note how much better every one is looking than they did at the fag end of the season. Refreshed and brightened by change of scene, sea breezes, mountain air, yachting trip, the waters at some "cure" or other, or by a series of visits at country houses, our acquaintances look younger instead of a month or two older as we give them our autumnal greeting. There is a brisk energy about them which enables them to face the prospect of an English winter with something approaching courage. And London is always delightful to return to after an absence, however pleasant the latter may have been in itself. When Walt Whitman longed for his "Manhattanese faces," we Londoners can sympathize with him, though we probably prefer our "Londonese faces." There are so many things to get back to after rustication and ruralizing or studying sky-scape and seascape all day long. There are the theatres, with the new plays prepared for the autumn season. Every one will want to see "She" at the Gaiety, having enjoyed the book with its marvellous imaginings. The play cannot be said to have the same charm as the book, but then it would have been quite impossible to represent adequately upon the stage the scenes so graphically depicted by Mr. Rider Haggard. The story is not quite clearly rendered at the Gaiety, and those among the audience who have not read the book must want to ask quite a number of questions when the curtain falls for the last time. There is quite sufficient, however, to attract in the very picturesque and beautiful scenery and the dramatic situations, to say nothing of the graceful presence of Miss Sophie Eyre as "She who must be obeyed." Miss Mary Rorke is pathetically touching as poor Ustane, whom Ayesha's jealousy so tragically finishes off in both book and play.

Another theatre that every one is visiting is the Haymarket, where Mr. Beerbohm Tree, in the character of Captain Swift, has

achieved another artistic triumph. His cultivated bushranger is a delightful study. Miss Rose Leclercq brings her truest art to bear upon her part in this play, and Mrs. Beerbohm Tree is, as ever, very pleasant to watch.

"Dorothy" is perennially charming. It will soon have reached its 750th performance, and the audiences show no signs of flagging. The pretty music is, of course, a large factor in the attractiveness of this abnormally successful "comedy opera," but such artists as Miss Marie Tempest and Mr. Hayden Coffin may be allowed their full share as magnets to the public favour.

The revival of "The Ticket-of-Leave Man" at the Olympic, under the direction of Miss Agnes Hewitt, is drawing good houses to the once very unlucky theatre in Vych Street.

Among coming events we have to look forward to the opening of the Lyceum early in December, with "Macbeth." Miss Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth is sure to invest with charm this very gloomiest of tragedies. Never was play so full of bad weather, and it seems almost regrettable that it should be so, so much have we all had to endure in that respect in real life during the last few months. One of the charms, to Londoners, not only after this disastrous season but at all times, of such plays as "bring the smell of the hay across the footlights," is the smiling picture of country life that they present. Robertson's comedies are delightful in this respect. Who that has seen it will ever forget the scene in "Ours," where the sunshine falls on the grass and trees, and character after character in the play comes on to soliloquize or converse, as the case may be? Then the summer shower that falls, and the girl singing the pathetic little song as she shelters under the branches of the tree. These things make a play live pleasantly in the memory, even when it lacks other qualities that might seem more directly to tend towards immortality.

Mr. Augustus Harris has been fortunate in securing charming Miss Winifred Emery to play the girl heroine in "The Armada," the "grand spectacular drama" now being played at Drury Lane. The cast is otherwise a strong one, and no doubt the drama will enjoy a long run.

I must not omit to remind those who have not seen "The Still Alarm" at the Princess's, that if they fail to do so, they will miss one of the most realistic, exciting and best-managed scenes ever seen on the stage. It is that in the Engine House.

Mrs. John Wood is certain of public favour in her capacity as manager of the Court Theatre, where the amusing "Surprises du Divorce" appears under the title "Mamma," this maternal epithet referring to the persistently recurrent mother-in-law who, like "She," "must be obeyed."

Nor must any lover of the drama omit to see Mr. Penley in "Uncles and Aunts," nor to hear the opera "Pepita" at Toole's,

with its tuneful music, its graceful dances, and the bright vivacity of the acting.

A word or two about the fashions may not be amiss just now, when most of us are intent upon securing comfortable autumn gowns, and are even thinking of winter mantles on cold days. From Paris I hear that everything is to be ruled on the lines of simplicity. Straight folds for skirts, little trimming for bodices, and long cloaks falling in direct lines from the shoulders are to be the correct wear. The dress improver is rapidly vanishing, to the great delight of persons of taste and of those who have waged war upon it with pen and pencil ever since the hideous thing first appeared. Only a quite small bunch is worn at the back of the skirt now, and it is produced without the agency of steels. A very tiny "mattress," as it is called in Paris, is inserted, and over this the folds of the skirt are tied back. This is very different from the enormous cushion and two steels which were in the ascendant this time last year, causing an irrelevant protrusion that was copied and exaggerated by the lower classes in a way that ought long ago to have disgusted those of a higher.

The popularity of grey still continues. Many red gowns will be worn this autumn, and those shades in which red and brown merge into each other will be largely in request. Some of these are difficult to name, others are well known as terra-cotta, brick, and the darker tones of copper. Green will certainly reappear in the spring, nor shall we by any means lose sight of it during the winter months. It is to be much worn for evening dress, and the beauty of some of the *réséda* and poplar greens will justify their popularity. Lime blossom and *eau-de-Nil* are other tones with which ball dresses are to be trimmed, if not entirely composed of them.

Black is in much demand just now for day wear, in conjunction with green, navy blue, white, grey, and other more vivid hues. A red serge dress of the most vivid poppy tint was seen at a fashionable watering place the other day with a voluminous black satin and lace balayeuse, a wide sash of black watered silk, a waistcoat to match the sash, hat in black lace trimmed with an immense group of large red poppies, and black gauntleted gloves that covered the arm to the elbow. The effect was good, for the red was a splendid shade which rejoiced the eye. In a deeper tone it would have jarred with the black. The latter looks extremely well in jet and moire, with dark green velvet. Very rich brocades and silks are to be worn, and the favourite style is to be the Directoire. Redfern has just made a gown of this description for the Queen of Portugal, in dark green cloth handsomely braided with green and gold cord.